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THE EMPTY HOUSE

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

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THE EMPTY HOUSE
AND OTHER STORIES

(page 310)

DREAM AND TOMMY

THE EMPTY HOUSE
AND OTHER STORIES

BY

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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THE EMPTY HOUSE

The long hand trembled slightly as it stirred across the invisible space that separated fifty-nine minutes, fifty-nine seconds past one, from two o'clock. One sometimes notices this mechanical emotion in clocks; although the fact is not imaginary, its relation to human events may be. Hosmer was too uncomfortable to imagine anything but the weather. That, by the least profane of many possible and powerful adjectives, was inhuman. He had long ago ceased to dare to look at the thermometer. It occurred to him that the hour of two was the hottest of the twenty-four, and this circumstance interested him because he had procrastinated his luncheon, and there yet yawned before him the tophet of going out for it.

His stenographer came in from hers at the precise moment when she should do so; it would have been difficult to say why he felt irritated at her duteous appearance; he had no objection to the girl — nice little thing, usually prompt and faithful. Why should he be annoyed because Miss Dobson chose to do what was right? He generally tried to do as much himself. What

would it feel like to do something not right — in fact, something obviously wrong? This question presented itself to him suddenly and savagely. Possible, improbable answers might have been painted in among the moral confusions, but Hosmer was not subtle. He was just a blunt, plain person, who took life as he found it, and found it as definite as the tables of stone. At the moment he did not try to delude himself; he found it as hard.

All his summers were bad enough — he was a cold-weather man, and shrivelled under the cruel heat more than other people may feel it necessary to do — but this year had been the worst of all. The thermometer, after crouching awhile, had sprung higher than history, and stayed there longer. And, then, he was not a natural club-man; he did not like it, nor pretend to; he never got used to it; he belonged to the dwindling class of lashed and leaping brain-workers who are still capable of loneliness.

The stenographer did not go to her desk, but stood for a moment and regarded him critically.

"It's pretty warm," she volunteered. "Had you better go out?"

"What would you suggest — that I omit the civic duty of eating altogether? That would be the easiest way, no doubt."

"You look pretty tired," replied the girl

slowly. She was accustomed to his phraseology, both professional and personal; his long words never troubled her.

"I own I am rather tired," he added, with an abrupt change of tone. He slid into his office chair. Alicia Dobson did not like his appearance, but she had the good sense not to say so. She handed him a large palm-leaf. Her impulse was to fan him, but she had the sense, also, not to do that. Instead, she spoke evenly in her uneventful voice: —

"Please, Mr. Hosmer, let me bring you something? I don't mind the weather much, and it's so near. Then you need not walk in the sun till it is cooler."

"It will never be cooler," he responded dogmatically. He sat frowning at his desk-telephone, as if that were to blame. When he turned his eyes, which he found it difficult to do without moving his head, he saw that the girl had gone.

The office-boy had blended into the atmosphere, somewhere, and Hills was on vacation. Hills usually contrived to take his vacation when everybody wanted one, and left his partner — as Larry and Alicia Dobson were left — to keep the firm going. Hosmer's head fell over upon his desk with the motion of a weariness so profound that a man does not mention it outside of his

family; or perhaps not to any one but a wife who loves him.

A diffident touch brushed his shoulder. When he had laboriously raised his head he saw the stenographer standing with both hands full of luncheon, which she proceeded to spread upon his desk, not without some attempt at daintiness.

"I told Larry to stay till I came!" she said, with more fervor than was characteristic of her manner. "I did not mean you should be left alone. That boy is an eel — always squirming off. Try this cold tea. No, it is not iced; I thought of that. It 's hard to choose in such weather, but I did the best I could — no meat, an egg-sandwich and such a *plain* salad, I thought you might taste of it."

Hosmer glanced from the luncheon to the stenographer.

"You are a thoughtful girl," he said gratefully.

"Shall I finish the brief?" asked Miss Dobson, with a little professional manner that she had; if stiff, it held at least a certain agreeable dignity. Hosmer said, "If you please," dully and formally, and she went to her own desk. He sat at his and tried, without much success, to honor his luncheon. The cold tea was pleasant, and he tossed the fruit-salad about with his fork. Guiltily he put the sandwiches into his green-cloth bag.

I DID NOT MEAN YOU SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE

Let her think that he had eaten them. It would be a pity to hurt her feelings.

He looked for his desk-thermometer, but could not find it. No doubt she had hidden it; she was capable of any number of little kind intentions. It must, then, be deuced hot — clearly too hot to work. It occurred to him that he might be justified in resting till the sun descended. He turned the key and rolled upon his lounge.

He might have slept, or thought he might, for it was well after five when he looked at his watch. The outer office was perfectly still. Miss Dobson and Larry were gone, of course. Hosmer pushed the door noisily. The eel had wriggled away, as was to be expected of his species, but the stenographer had not left. She sat in her cool linen suit, with her straw hat across her folded hands. No, she was not working; watching, it seemed. Hosmer was conscious of a foggy annoyance at this, and nodded at her curtly.

"You will not be needed any further," he observed, as he put on his hat. "You may lock up and go."

Miss Dobson made no reply; he perceived that she was scrutinizing his face without the manner of doing so. He stumbled to the elevator. The air of the street was no better than the office air — hotter, if anything. He felt as if it were a scorching current that he must breast. He swam

on, doggedly, panting as he went — where? Where should he go? He thought of his club with a sick distaste. It would be filled with the fellows known as the "hurrah boys" because they had escaped the society of their wives, who were sporting at summer resorts. It seemed to him out of the question to go and sit with the crowd on the piazza over the river, and smoke and hear the usual stories. The clink of ice in long glasses might be bearable some other time — not to-night.

"I don't really think I'm very well," he thought. His fingers fumbled in his pockets and grasped his latch-key. Without clear reflection, and quite without recognized emotion, he directed his wavering steps toward his own home.

They had decided between them to close it; or Isabel had decided — he could not remember which of them flung the casting vote; he did not recall making objections if he had any. No doubt it was the proper thing to do. Occasionally he wished the man had been kept upon the premises, so that the master could camp there once in a while if he felt inclined; but Dennis (in search of theoretic burglars or psychical tramps) came only once a week. In fact, Hosmer seldom interfered with his wife's domestic purposes; the habit of doing what she wanted done was of such long standing that he had ceased to discriminate

between his preferences and her own. There had come to be but one will in the family, and that will was Isabel's.

Plainly, if Isabel were comfortable on the coast of Maine, she ought to stay where she was comfortable. Why should two suffer because one must? Once there were other years, hazy as a smoky sou'wester and as beautiful. She would not leave him then; she said she could not. Two summers she stayed in the grilling town with him — but he was sure it was never so hot then; the house was dim and cool when he came home; she floated downstairs in long white negligées; her arms — Isabel used to have a beautiful arm. *Used?* Why — no, heaven correct him! he could not tell whether she had pretty arms or not — now. On general principles he thought she must have. Isabel was always an attractive woman. She used to have a sense of humor, too, and made so much fun of their discomforts that these assumed interesting aspects like a landscape seen through differently colored glasses fastened in a window for the purpose of changing the effect.

As he put the key in the door, he remembered her coming to the office once in her soft white, and saying, —

"You're just a waffle, you poor dear thing! Shut in an iron pan, with dimples both sides so as to bake the batter through."

That was the summer they went to Appleton Landing — the baby was either teething, or indulging in some other of the inconvenient practices of his class. It was quite right to consider the baby. It had always been right to consider the children. Isabel was on undeniably moral ground about that. You could n't keep children in a waffle-iron. Hosmer had never combated the perfectly unquestionable premises of the syllogism which results in a three months' divorce every summer between a man and his family. True, the process of deduction had never been as plain to him as it had been to her. He had never been quite able to see why it was necessary for them to go so far from him. He had been happy at Appleton Landing — pathetically happy, as he looked back upon it: the cool trips in the steamer; the inexpensive, small house, all piazzas, breeze-swept and salt, almost cold, heavenly cold if the wind went east; he had been fond of that box at Appleton Landing. He had forgotten what reasons Isabel had for thinking it would be better for the children to go to Maine. He paid the hotel bills without a murmuring chirp; if he sometimes thought them pretty large, he had never told her so. Isabel knew. It had been the armor of his life for a good many years to assume that Isabel knew. Possibly it might be called chain-armor — a flexile thing,

with crevices through which a man might look and criticise the way matters went if he chose. But Hosmer had not chosen. He admired his wife; go so far as to say that he loved her — on general principles, again. What too busy man could stop to inoculate an emotion? Of all the driven horde stampeded by the slaughter of modern life in our maddened towns, Hosmer belonged to the class most to be compassionated and the least ready to accept compassion — the intellectual men; and he ranked among the flagellated of these — he was a successful lawyer.

Only the popular physician could presume to wear, on bleeding galls, a heavier harness. Even the journalist, reeling red copy from a burning desk, had his hours off. It seemed to Hosmer that all his hours were on and must remain on; for he had reached the descending rung in the ladder of overwork where he was so tired that it had ceased to appear possible to rest. If court did not hold, office practice did. He had come to the point where respite is inaccessible because it is inconceivable. True, Isabel had suggested his coming on to Paradise Point. He had thought this kind in Isabel, and meant to re-read her letter when he could.

Now that he thought of it, that was one reason why he came to the house. It would be cool and it would be still. His head reverberated so that

he could not decipher the letter where it was hot and noisy. His wife wrote a careless hand; anything will do for husbands, and she crossed her pages without manners or mercy.

The house *was* cool; a waft of damp dustiness met him as he opened the inner door of the vestibule. The hall was large, and the bare floor echoed as he crossed it; all the rugs were gone. Fingering his breast-pocket for his letter, he went into the drawing-room. The dusty dampness which he had perceived on the threshold settled in the drawing-room like fogs upon a cemetery; the furniture, shrouded in sickly linen, grouped before him like old marble monuments grayed by time; the long windows were shuttered, and only fragments of the day, from heart-shaped incisions in the boards, fell upon the floor. The carpet was left, but yards of linen grave-clothes covered it; the stuff was slippery, and Hosmer slid upon it. The grate was empty and clean. The pictures were swathed in tarlatan, and the chandeliers. A ghostly, he felt it to be a ghastly, gloom received the master of the house.

It was impossible to see in this receiving-vault, and he hurried with his letter to the library. He had never liked the drawing-room, even when it was alive. He associated it with Tuesdays in February or with clubs formed for the purpose of studying Mind in some feminine

form. Last winter Isabel joined a class devoted to the honor of Buddha. She was passing through that phase of social existence which occupies itself with the effort to prove the supremacy of any and every other kind of religious cult except a too familiar and unfashionable Christianity.

Isabel was given over to something else, now, at Paradise Point. What was it? The letter would tell. He pushed in the door of his library and sank down in his own comfortable green-leather chair. One of the library windows was unshuttered — a high window, and small. A languid light lived in the room and he read: —

"Doto and Bert are having the time of their lives. Paradise Point is the most admirable selection I ever made for the children. Bert has learned to sail a cat-boat like a fisherman, and Doto took a prize in the second event in the hotel swimming-match. Her suit was red, with white trimmings. She is going to be very pretty in a year or so. The air —" and so forth. "The climate —" and so on. "The society —" Hosmer skipped the society. "The entertainments —" he elided the entertainments, and his sun-shot eyes slipped along, not seeing very well, to a sentence on which they paused.

"Cousin Robert Granger is here at the hotel. You remember Bob, I am sure. You know —

the one you did n't like (you goose) before we were engaged. He has not married yet, but he 's got over all that nonsense. He is very kind to the children.

"I wish you would run down and thank him. I am afraid you are working too hard, you poor old thing. Why don't you take vacations like other men? You could, I'm sure, if you would. I don't like to think of you fricasseeing down there while you could be so cool and happy with us. There's a summer school of theosophy here that would interest you. Cousin Robert gave a lecture there last night. I have joined a class and find it a most absorbing subject."

So that was it. He was to come to Paradise Point to thank Cousin Robert for being kind to Isabel — no, kind to the children? Yes, kind to the children. And to attend lectures on theosophy in a summer school? Yes. He would be — baked first. The letter slid from shaking fingers; he noticed that he did not hold things firmly the last few days. He picked it up to put it in his green bag. As he did so he touched something that crinkled. It was the white oiled paper in which Miss Dobson had brought the sandwiches that he could not eat. His lips, swollen by the heat, muttered a few thick words.

"That girl never forgets anything a fellow needs."

He got up and clattered on over the rugless floors into the dining-room, where it seemed necessary, if anywhere, to eat the sandwiches. He sat at his beautiful bare mahogany table and finished the luncheon, every crumb. He felt stronger after this and disproportionately grateful. He was very thirsty, but he remembered that the water was shut off. Isabel had thought it would be better. It occurred to him to telephone for somebody to turn it on — Dennis, for instance. But he remembered that the telephone was disconnected. Isabel had thought it would be safer. Isabel probably knew. He owned to feeling too ill to stumble down cellar and turn on the water himself — if, indeed, he knew how; he was not sure that he did. Having concluded his sandwich, he wiped the crumbs away carefully; Isabel would not like to have crumbs left on the table; she was a particular housekeeper. Sometimes he would have liked to fling down his coat and hat, anyhow, when he came home tired out; or toss his slippers about when he was rushing away mornings. But Isabel never allowed any such irregularities. He had moments of longing for a good, comfortable, tousled house in which he might feel like a master, rather than a sla — he changed the word civilly to guest. He had never been disloyal to Isabel in his innermost thought; he was one of the dogged, duteous American husbands whose patience and

good-nature are the pride of our people, if the sneer of Europe.

But now, while he was brushing up the sandwich crumbs, he was seized with an uncontrollable mania to do something which Isabel would not wish him to do. It occurred to him that he was alone in the house. It occurred to him to go so far as to say that the house was his. He thought he would like to find some clothes to hurl, just to see what it would be like to fling a big, masculine disorder into the proper, feminine place. Pleased with the idea, he began to wander over the house; its desolation and darkness oppressed him and dulled the fervor of his rebellion to Isabel's good government. But when he reached his own room — it was lighter upstairs — the impulse returned.

"I must have some flannels and things," he thought. He dashed open the bureau drawers, but Isabel was too good a housekeeper to leave winter flannels there; these were all locked away in cedar chests in the attic; he found nothing that seemed hurlable or flingable but a few old summer trousers and shirts; still pursued by his whim, he tore these out and scattered them over the room. Having regarded them for a few minutes with an unexampled sense of domestic freedom, he began to arrange them to suit his fancy in the shape of human figures upon the floor.

By this time he found that he was more tired,

instead of less so, and he turned to get upon his bed. Even the bed would not receive him; the mattresses were duly turned over the foot of the bedstead, and covered with unbleached cotton cloth. He whacked the mattresses back upon the spring and threw himself down heavily.

The room was cool, if musty, and the whole house was as still as the dust that slept in it. Hosmer thought that he might rest just where he was; he needed sleep; it was — how many nights? — since it had been cool enough for a man to keep his burning eyes closed. His last case had been a severe and important one, and the fellows at the club had gone in for a good many late dinners; it had been unusually noisy; there was little or no chance for him. He accepted the shelter of his own dismantled room with a sense of relief that was, at first, profound. Again, as in the office, he slept, or thought he slept — he was not quite sure which — on the rough pillows of his unmade bed. There was an electric fan on a table beside it, but he could not recall whether Isabel had ordered the current turned off or not, and he did not touch the fan. After a time the sense of relief changed into one of discomfort so marked that he roused and considered its nature. He found it to be nothing more nor less than simple thirst — scorching thirst. If Miss Dobson had only added a bottle of water — but even a superior

stenographer might not be able to follow all the contingencies liable to meet a worn-out man in a deserted house.

Suddenly Hosmer had a real pang of longing for his wife — a sense of hurt and loss, a recurrence of the old impulse of their first married years, when it was natural to turn to her with things that were hard. She used to have a pretty, womanly way of being sorry — Isabel. If he had a headache, she made more fuss about it than if it were her own. If he lost a case, she would creep up and close her arms about his neck, quietly, — not too many words, — yes, they *were* beautiful arms. Isabel would feel badly if she knew how uncomfortable he was. But Isabel was sitting in one of her expensive lingerie dresses on the cool piazzas at Paradise Point. Her Cousin Robert was with her. What was it? Yes, he was to go down and thank Bob for being kind to the children.

Muttering actionable imprecations, Hosmer got up.

"I must go back to the club," he said. "I'm too thirsty to stay here."

He glanced at the disorder on the floor. For the first time he noticed how he had left the clothes figures; their empty arms were folded over their empty hearts in the fashion of the dead.

"Let them stay," he said grimly. "Isabel

won't like it — but Isabel is n't here. Let them be."

He got himself weakly down the echoing stairs. Once in the hot streets, he made his way more by instinct than by knowledge to the club. There was a college dinner "on," and the noise raved till morning. At dawn the work-worn and weather-smitten man slept a little.

For some days the thermometer in the office remained at or near the danger point. Hosmer had a brief to finish — and he finished it; difficult witnesses to examine — and he examined them. He was used to doing whatever ought to be done. He stood at his post with that massive and uncomplaining capacity for bearing hardship which is the shining quality of men. A woman may endure as much or more, but she wants to say so. At the least, allow her the protest of the tears which she respects, and he scorns.

Since he worked his way through college — a plucky, orphaned lad — Hosmer had never been known to whine. He could not remember when he had been conscious of a dropped link between himself and his duty as he was now. The chain did not relate, and the creaking derrick of his intolerable load groaned and paused.

Hosmer dictated his brief patiently. His eyes were bloodshot, his head waltzed; he leaned his

forehead on his hand; his words grew slow and thickened.

The stenographer laid down her notes. Her face had perceptibly paled; she felt the weather, too, poor girl; she raised her eyes timidly, but with a straight soberness that he honored from his heart.

"Mr. Hosmer," she said, "you are not fit to work to-day. You will excuse me, but I cannot write for you any more this morning."

She put her pad and pencil on her desk; her hand shook slightly, like the stem of a strong vine nailed to a trellis, and, nevertheless, responding to a rising wind.

"Don't you think," she added, without looking at him, "that you had better get to the sea — at once? I can telegraph Mrs. Hosmer for you if you don't feel able — or telephone. But I think — I am sure —" She stopped abruptly.

Hosmer sat staring at her. He did not blame her as she feared; nor did he praise her, as she might have also feared. He seemed either unable to think, or unable to express thought — she could not decide which, and this disturbed her most of all.

"Would you mind seeing the doctor?" she ventured at last.

"He's out of town," returned Hosmer sharply. "Everybody's out of town — but you."

He regarded her with frowning eyes. One might have thought that he disliked the girl; there was something savage in his intentness. His lips did not speak; but his soul did.

"God!" it cried. "She's cool — Isabel's quite cool — and comfortable. And here's this girl — put off her vacation till my work lets up — stands by like a soldier — stands by like a man, like a — no, *not* like a man. It takes a woman. It takes a good, straight woman who knows what work means — a plain girl who tries to do right — God bless her!"

He had now found his audible voice, but it did not articulate easily, nor say, "God bless you," to Alicia Dobson. Instead, it gave her only a few commonplace, courteous words: —

"I am grateful to you. You are a good, kind, girl. Will you please bring me a glass of water?"

She brought the water without remark, and stood before him in an attitude of hesitation. How did she always contrive to look cool? Was it her dress? Or her temperament? Or perhaps the way she fixed her hair — none of these rats' nests that women wear on their silly heads. Hosmer's mind struggled muddily with this idea while Miss Dobson removed her black silk cuffs and assumed the air of awaiting orders to go somewhere.

"I don't want my luncheon brought in to-

day," he said, pressing his hand upon his eyes. "Thank you," he added, as an afterthought.

"There are other doctors," suggested the girl. "Even if Doctor Janeway is on vacation. They don't *all* desert *everybody*. There are responsible men still in town. If you would let me, Mr. Hosmer?"

"Have we any lemons in the office?" he asked, with an abrupt irrelevance.

"No. We used the last yesterday."

"Where's Larry?"

"Oh, he's squirmed off somewhere. I think this time you sent him to the bank, did n't you?"

"Probably I did. I don't remember. I feel as if I should like some lemonade — no ice."

"I will run out and get the lemons at once," replied Alicia eagerly.

Hosmer answered, "Thank you, Miss Dobson," with marked politeness, and Miss Dobson put on her straw hat with the plain white silk scarf. She dressed with severe reserve, but then she was "different," as might have been seen. Alicia was the daughter of an old classmate, whose family Gilbert Hosmer had not forgotten when his friend slipped from the crazy bridge of life into the racing current of a sudden death.

Hosmer had always in his business the consciousness that he was dealing with a lady; the fact, which had its delicate advantages, might

have had for many men its delicate perils. But this one could not remember — through all the stress of the unnatural intimacy into which modern life throws the man and the woman in our office world — any time when he had been confused or tried. An ideal of honor may "float" from the core, like the casting in the pillar that collapsed and hurled down the Pemberton Mill forty years ago; no one suspects till the catastrophe crashes that the defect exists. Hosmer's pillars were straight and true in the moulding of them; he lifted life by their coherency; he was old-fashioned in his ideas of the moral edifice into which every man and woman of us is built; he had never played with the most respectable of the emotions which we are accustomed to call interest or friendship or sympathy; he was the husband of his wife. Isabel might amuse herself with cousins at the seaside. He was not amused without Isabel.

Now — now — he could not deny it — he was overworked; he was physically hurt somewhere; the weather had betrayed him; he was a sick man — a pretty lonely one, if you came to that. Isabel did not know; Isabel did not think. She was not like this one. Life, which was overpowering him, was weakening her, too, in her way, her so different way. He worked; she played. He endured; she enjoyed herself. He remembered; she

forgot. The stampede was forcing them apart. The horde was rushing over him; he felt to the last nerve and sinew in him that he was about to be trampled — whether morally or physically, who knew? A sense of emergency struck like a hoof upon his shrinking consciousness.

"Lord knows," he muttered, "whether I'm going to have a stroke or be a fool. Something ails me — that's clear. What was it I meant to do while she was out after lemons?"

It now came back to him that he had meant to escape; it was not quite clear what he should escape — whether a luncheon, or a doctor, or just the girl; the good, kind, thoughtful girl who never forgot anything a man needed; who did not go to the seashore to keep cool while he grilled in the office; the girl who stood at her post and did what was right. At all events, he had sent her for lemons for some reason, and he never intended to wait for the lemons.

He locked his desk, groped for his panama, put it on and went, stepping cautiously because he was so dizzy. At the car he met Larry, the eel, squirming out. The boy had an umbrella, his employer's silk one; Larry always took good care of his precious self.

"It 's a scorchinblazer," observed Larry. "You 'd oughter have an umb'rell."

"I suppose I might take this one if I were al-

lowed to," replied Hosmer, with a distorted smile. The boy held out the umbrella, and the man took it and went on. From the elevator he called back, not very distinctly: —

"Tell Miss Dobson I've gone out. She can finish the brief. She need not feel any uneasiness if I do not come back."

Larry stood stupidly, and then he did a thing that was not stupid. He took the other elevator and swung down. The boy saw the master dive into the river of fire that ran through the street — become submerged — and sink from sight.

In the southwesterly under which the town writhed, cursing, the Maine coast might have been said to sing for joy. There (its best friends claimed), as nowhere else, the summer sea dimpled into the contagious laughter which causes the weariest man to smile, and the bitterest to thank God. There the torture by fire is neither known, nor feared — and fear is the multiple of suffering. One is cooler to-day because he knows that he will be cool to-morrow. Whatever your creed, you have been all summer of the conviction that the old theology was not far wrong which defined hell as sheer hotness. By this simple qualification you are in heaven, and know you are, who have escaped with your life from a southerly city to Paradise Point.

A guest at the Paradise Hotel — himself being a Philadelphian — thought something of this kind and said as much to the lady on the rocks at his side. It is true that he put the idea more abruptly, with less imagination.

"I am in Paradise," he bluntly said.

"One never says that, after the first season," she observed. "It is the sign and seal of a new boarder."

"Oh, no doubt the joke is old enough," he returned, in his cultivated, cynical tone, "but every new boarder does not have my provocation, Belle."

Isabel Hosmer gave her cousin a narrow look, in which, had he been fine enough, he might have detected a critical summing up of him such as no man is quite prepared for in a woman whose youth he had found kind. He was not as fine as, for instance (she caught herself concluding), she used to think him, and might even have blundered on; but she was too swift for him, as women are for men, and intercepted.

"Bob," she said, "look at the water — no, not at me. Cousin Robert, I mean what I say. I've enjoyed having you here immensely, and I asked Gilbert to run down and thank you for being so kind to the children, but I do not find it amusing to be looked at like that. By the way, where *are* the children, Cousin Robert?"

"God!" cried Cousin Robert unexpectedly. "They've taken that cat-boat. I told them not to. They'll be at the bottom of the bay if Bert handles those halliards like that! Let me by, Belle — quick!"

As Isabel followed the racing man, but incredibly far behind him, — when had the middle-aged mother run thirty steps? — she found these words and no others in her mind: —

"If anything happens to those children! If anything happens to those children — and their father not here!"

Then she began to scream: "Doto! Bert! *Doto!*"

"You'll *scare* them overboard!" shouted back her cousin over his shoulder. "Keep still, I tell you!"

The facts were as brief as the telling. While the two had been patronizing theosophy and redeeming an old flirtation upon the rocks, the southerly had veered without warning, and a northwest wind, all flaws and claws, was berating the cat-boat. This was not so far out but that Granger's controlled voice carried clearly to the children. Isabel could hear it as she ran.

"Bert! Let those halliards alone! Doto! Sit still and stop laughing! This is no laughing matter. Keep perfectly still till I get there!"

The people from the hotel had begun to collect

upon the pier. An elderly man, a new guest, came up and put an arm out to steady the trembling mother.

"Don't be too much alarmed, madam," he said earnestly. "The children have snarled their halliards and the boat is careening a little. But he will get there. Your husband is rowing well. Used to the water, is n't he? See. He is climbing over the stern. Now he has fastened the painter of the dory. He will have those halliards right, immediately. He is very skilful — there! The danger is entirely over, madam. I congratulate you with all my heart."

"Oh, thank you," said Isabel fatuously.

Some of the piazza ladies came up and spoke to her, assuming to comfort her in their voluble, unreal way. Neither her agitation nor her alarm were sufficient to prevent the fire that smarted on her cheeks. Had they heard what the old gentleman said? Now that the children were safe, this seemed a vital matter. She eluded the summer women — some of them were of the sort who assassinate reputations on piazzas — and got herself down the steps to the float. A lady from Philadelphia came, too, and said how heroic Mr. Granger was! Isabel was swaying there when the boats came in with Robert and the children. What with her fright and the motion of the float, she was sickened gray-white. She could with

difficulty see plainly; she would not have known one child from the other, except that the girl, in her little embroidered linen dress, made a splash of pink against the sky. The boy was blue.

They clambered out — the pink spot and the blue one — and Doto kissed her mother. But the boy stood stiff like a man and kissed nobody.

"I'll pull the dory out," said Robert Granger, lifting wet hands from a dripping hauling-line. "You need not wait for me. You will feel the effects of this."

Conscious of an ungrateful release from an awkward moment, Isabel obeyed without a protest. It occurred to her, as Doto scampered up the steps like a monkey, and Bert chivalrously boosted his mother from behind, that she had not so much as thanked Bob for saving her little sinners. Illusion had swirled upon its delicate pivot, and in a moment, in the leaping of a wave, she swung over into the imperious, the supreme facts of life.

The old gentleman stood watching the group with a politely veiled perplexity. Robert pulled on the hauling-line and the dory leaped out. The float-master furled the sail of the cat-boat, singing as he made her fast for the night, and the small drama, which might have been the great tragedy, came to its end.

Isabel and her children went up the pier. She

was cowardly glad that Robert did not join them. Doto pranced about in her too elaborate dress, looking over her shoulder to see how her large sash hung. Doto did all the talking, and her mother winced from the child's artificial voice; it imitated the tones of the piazza ladies; the girl was losing her naturalness, her reality; she needed — they all needed — heaven knew what: something, Isabel felt, that she had lost the power of bestowing, or perhaps even of acquiring.

"What 's up, Mommer?" demanded Doto loudly. "Somebody wants something. Look!"

A bell-boy from the hotel was running down to the pier. Isabel glanced at him without interest. She was so much absorbed in her uncomfortable thoughts that she did not perceive, until her name was twice repeated, that the bell-boy was in search of herself.

"Mrs. Hosmer? Mrs. Hosmer? Is Mrs. Hosmer here? She's wanted at the telephone!

"The wire's in order again," added the boy. "Lucky, for it's long distance."

Isabel, in her modish lingerie dress, rustled into the telephone booth crisply. The pallor of her recent emotion was still upon her face, and this refined it — she was a handsome woman, at her least attractive moments. The children had crowded against her, but she put them both away.

"It's probably your father," she said. "He may be coming down to spend a few days with us here."

"Popper won't like my bathing-suit," complained Doto.

"You're always finding fault with Father," Bert retorted loyally. "*I'll* take him out sailing."

The voices of the children ceased in the closing of the muffled door. Isabel lifted her matronly arm — her still beautiful arm — to the high receiver; she wore a placid expression.

"That you, Gilbert?" she asked pleasantly.

A voice not Gilbert's — a woman's voice — replied: —

"Mrs. Hosmer? Is this Mrs. Hosmer?"

"I am Mrs. Hosmer."

"This is Alicia Dobson."

"Ah — yes. Good-evening, Miss Dobson."

"I tried to telephone you before. The line was out of order. Is Mr. Hosmer with you? Has he been at Paradise Point?"

"Why, no!" cried Mrs. Hosmer crisply. She had begun to say, "Why should he be?" but checked herself in time. "He has not been here — no. What is the matter? Is anything wrong?"

The returning voice faltered over the wire. "That's just it. I don't know."

"Don't *know?* What in the world do you mean? Explain yourself, Miss Dobson."

"He has not been at the office since yesterday morning. He always lets us know if he does n't come."

"Is n't he at the club?"

"I've telephoned to the club; that is, I got a man to do it — some one I knew. I thought he must be with you."

"Where is Mr. Hills?"

"Mr. Hills is on vacation. Nobody is here but Larry and myself. Larry was the last person —" Alicia's voice fell apart like a broken necklace, and scattered before she gathered it again. "Mrs. Hosmer, I think you ought to know. Mr. Hosmer has felt the weather very much. He has n't seemed himself. I'm afraid — Oh, I am afraid he is sick — somewhere."

"Where's the doctor? Where's the doctor? Why did n't you call Doctor Janeway?"

"Doctor Janeway is expected back, but he has n't come. Everybody is out of town — but Mr. Hosmer."

"Have you thought of the house?"

"I believe I've thought of everything. Dennis is having a vacation, too. He has the keys. Oh, I ought to have told you before how worn out Mr. Hosmer is. But I could n't bear to intrude, to interfere. I'm afraid I did wrong. I've done the best I knew how. I've called up the hospitals."

"*Hospitals?*"

"There are a good many sun prostrations," admitted Alicia reluctantly. "Twenty yesterday."

"How do you know," came sharply back from Paradise Point, "that he is n't away on business?"

"I thought of that. But you see I know about almost all his business."

The wife was too exalted by excitement, or too dull from usage, to shrink before the fine inference from these words.

"There's nothing to call him anywhere now — unless to you," quivered Alicia. "Oh, Mrs. Hosmer, what shall I do?"

"I shall start at once. I shall take the night train," panted Isabel. "I thank you very much," she managed to say. "Good-by." She hung up the receiver slowly. For the moment her mind and her body both refused to move.

"And Gilbert, too!" she thought. In a day, in an hour, in the sighing of a tide, in the blending of a sunset from tint to tint, everything might have been blotted from her. Was the greatest of all — the dearest of all — left her yet?

In the close, hot booth her chin sank upon her embroidered breast. Gilbert! Had she *treated* him as if he were the greatest fact in life? *Gilbert!* Perishing there without her in that hell!

Her cousin, Robert Granger, took her to the station, and Doto clung to her, fretting; but Bert's under-lip trembled like a man's — a man who may not cry.

"You are quite sure that you will not let me accompany you?" urged Robert anxiously, "There might be some need of me when you reach Boston, you know."

But Isabel shook her head. Her manner was quite decided.

"Who would take care of the children? I know they will be quite safe with you. Promise me not to let them go on the water again till I — till we — come back!" she commanded. "Of course, I shall bring Gilbert here at once."

He promised and lifted his hat, and they shook hands, and she went. From the car-window she called down to him. "If there should be anything — anything for you to do — you could come. But you'd bring the children! Don't leave them, not one day!"

He promised again and the train slid away with her. The dimples of the sea drew in. The salt cool dwindled. The shore raced and was behind.

It was with a pang of cruel joy that she felt the oppressive heat of the car as the land winds smote her in the face. She repeated her husband's name over and over, stiffly, as if her mind refused to work beyond it. *Gilbert!*

The train was on schedule time, and drew into the city wearily. The passengers, pale with the heat, escaped from the intolerable sleeper into the scarcely more tolerable outer air, with a hope of relief which was blasted at its birth. The day threatened to be the most merciless of the summer.

Apt as she was in her little domestic world, outside of it Isabel was as untrained as her daughter. She was not accustomed to making important decisions or managing serious affairs alone. Her husband had reefed the sails of life for her before every flaw or squall, and tempests she had never known.

As she stood with one foot on the step of her cab, debating what orders to give, she overtook her mind in these preposterous words: "Gilbert will tell me what I ought to do first." She had half expected Alicia Dobson to be at the station — Dennis, or even Larry. Hosmer had always eagerly met his wife, or devotedly escorted her off, at every trip she had made for eighteen years.

Thrown by an unprecedented fate upon herself, she followed the direction of least resistance, and drove to her husband's office. It was still very early, and she had eaten nothing. To do her justice, she had not thought of that. She clung to the elevator cage as she swung up, her pallor gleaming through the tan of Paradise Point.

The office was empty, except for the eel, who

received her soberly. Larry had nothing to add to her slender knowledge of the facts. No, Miss Dobson had n't come in. She might be out looking. Larry himself had been out looking. No, Mr. Hosmer had not been to the office since that day when Larry lent him his umbrella. It was a very hot day. Larry suggested that to-day was going to be something fierce. Larry prophesied it would be a scorchinblazer.

"Tell Miss Dobson," began Mrs. Hosmer, "that I have been here and have gone —" But where was she likely to go? For one childish moment she wished that she had let Robert Granger come with her, or even the old gentleman who said that dreadful thing on the pier. All that was womanish and inexpert in her felt that she needed a man. In her wavering weakness she did, perhaps, the very thing that she should have done, — she drove rapidly to her own home.

It was closed and still. The lids of shutters and curtains lay heavily upon the eyes of the windows. The face of the house looked dead to her, and she shivered in the accelerating heat of the day. A halting figure, in her long, thin silk traveling coat, she climbed the steps.

The outer door of the vestibule was open; but this might mean nothing. It meant something that the inner door should be unlocked. At her trembling touch the knob yielded, and, shaken

with a dread which scarcely fell short of horror, she stepped into the silent house.

The dank dustiness of the hall oppressed her lungs, and she stood for a moment and gasped in it. The drawing-room doors were open and she could see the shrouded furniture; to her, too, it had that uncanny aspect; her own sofa and chairs looked to her like monuments in a cemetery. Her unpleasant impressions were so strong that she refrained from entering the drawing-room and passed on across the hall. On the hat-tree under the stairs a small object lighter than the gloom arrested her confused attention. It did not look to her like any of her husband's hats. But then whose? Her mind concentrated itself upon this triviality — conscious at once that it was, and was not, vital to the position in which she found herself.

She stood irresolute at the bottom of the long dusty stairs; with her foot on the lower step she paused. No — the house was not deserted. Over her head were the signs of human movements and — no — yes — *yes* — the suppressed sound of human voices.

"Who is there?" she called distinctly. "Is anybody upstairs?"

Her eyes had now become accustomed to the dimness of the shuttered house, and when the form of a man cloudily appeared at the top of

the stairs, she recognized the figure and face without difficulty. That pillar of domestic life who is known in family phraseology as "the man" stood with protruding, startled eyes and gazed down upon her. Dennis had gone quite dumb. He opened and shut his mouth several times, but no sound escaped.

With the instinct of long dependence upon the Irish brawn and heart which had stood the household in loyal stead for half a dozen years, she cried loudly: "Oh, Dennis! *You* can help me. Tell me where Mr. Hosmer is!"

She started to mount the stairs and had taken some half-dozen steps before Dennis's articulation found him, and his rude bass reverberated through the empty house.

"Mrs. Hosmer! Don't! Stay where ye are. Don't come any farther. Mr. Hosmer's sick, I tell yez — Mrs. Hosmer, ye *shan't* come up!"

The strong, serving hands that had never refused obedience to her lightest whim before, defied and barred her way.

"Ain't there nobody but meself to break it to yez?" groaned Dennis. "Himself has had a stroke. I've telephoned the doctor, but it ain't no use desavin' yez. Mr. Hosmer ain't — he is — Mr. Hosmer is —"

The grip at her heart supplied the word that the Irishman spared her.

There seemed to be some person on the upper landing, but Isabel tottered past him without attention. She thought she had been prepared for anything, for any form of the ghastly truth, and was conscious of a latent purpose to meet the worst without a physical collapse. She was not prepared for the moral shock which seized her, soul and body, when, having entered her husband's room, she found a woman kneeling on the floor beside him.

Hosmer was lying on the unmade bed, close to the edge of the mattress, as if he had flung himself down anyhow in a condition which found him too weak to stand. His panama hat was crushed beneath his feet, and his green bag and umbrella lay upon the floor. A bottle, the contents of which were half drained, had fallen from his hand upon the mattress.

For one whirling instant Isabel thought of the poison stories that one reads in the newspapers. Her husband lay ominously still. Not a sign of life escaped from his long inert body.

The woman who knelt beside him was holding a slender, capable finger on his pulse. When the wife stirred and towered above her, the kneeling girl gave way. The straight, sober eyes of Alicia Dobson seemed to rise as her slight figure rose, and to fill and dominate the room. When she whispered, "Take my place," Isabel obeyed

without a question. She dropped to her knees beside the bed, and her inexperienced fingers faltered after an unanswering pulse. Overcome by the quick despair of the first supreme anguish that she had ever known, or perhaps partly to hide the evidences of it upon her face, she laid her cheek upon her husband's hand. As she moved to do this, she perceived the clothes figures lying on the floor at her feet, with crossed arms, in the fashion of the dead.

The person in the hall had come into the room and was standing beside Alicia Dobson. Isabel, in a subterranean way, was aware of this fact. She wondered if the man were a nurse. Then a more startling, a dreadful thought occurred to her. The stranger seemed to be chafing her husband's feet. Dennis was there now. Alicia had sent him to the druggist's for something. Dennis was trying to open a window — Alicia told him to. Dennis was muttering foolishly: —

"Wake up, sorr! Wake up for Dennis!"

Alicia took command of everything. The wife still knelt with her warm face upon her husband's hand and wrist. She perfectly recognized her helplessness, her ignorance. She had never learned how to count a pulse. Gilbert took all the care if anybody in the house were sick. It might have seemed to her that a wavering

thread of motion stirred in the wrist beneath her cheek; but she knew that she knew no more about it than Dennis or Larry. When Doctor Janeway came in, she did not lift her head.

The physician's omnivoyant eye caught the bottle on the bed. He tore the cork out — smelt and tasted — and pushed it away. It was a bottle of water, nothing else.

With ears that rang like a disordered wire, Isabel heard Doctor Janeway telling her to get up and go somewhere till he called her. She obeyed him stupidly. Alicia drew her into the next room — it was Isabel's own room — and the two women sat down there. Neither spoke. Isabel felt that the air between them was surcharged with something more important than life or death. She anticipated, even at that moment, the inevitable crisis through which she and the girl must sometime pass.

From the dismantled room came the sound of windows dashed up, and the electric fan upon the table by the bed began to whirr. The physician worked solemnly. He had staked his hope of the case upon a bold experiment, unknown until that fatal summer to the usual practitioner — the treatment of the apparently dead from sun prostration by the processes used for the resuscitation of the drowned.

Isabel sat straight with level eyes. Through

the opened door she could see the clothes corpses lying on the floor of her husband's room. Doctor Janeway did not call her, and she dared not cross the physician's will. It occurred to her that her incompetence and her neglect had cost her, in that hour, the first rights of a wife.

She listened with an acute anguish for some summons to her own place, in the awful war between life and death. She had expected some dramatic crisis, either for joy or for woe; she was conscious of surprise at the doctor's commonplace and uneventful manner, when he took a step out and beckoned her.

"Mrs. Hosmer," he said in his ordinary voice, "I think you had better be the first person — if he recognizes you. I believe he will."

She had now absorbed some of the contagious self-control by which the physician had affected every person in the room. With the composure of a much better-disciplined woman she went in and sat down on the empty side of the mattress, bringing her own face between her husband's and the light of the hot day. He did not stir nor open his eyes and she held her breath with a sick fear. The physician did not speak. Alicia Dobson had come in and stood beside the stranger across the room; Dennis, at the foot of the bed, was sobbing like the people in the old-fashioned death-bed pictures. The sound overcame Isabel, and she

cringed under it, piteously putting out one hand behind her to bid Dennis govern himself. The action changed her position and brought her face more clearly into a bar of dusty light that sought her from a window where the blinds hung loose. She could not have said that she had seen Gilbert lift his eyelids or move his lips, when the fragments of his voice seemed to her to rise and fill the air: —

"That you, Isabel? — Kind of you."

He made no attempt to add to these words for that day, or the next. When he spoke again, it was at some length, and with evidence of uneasiness or anxiety.

"Are the children here?"

"No. They shall come any time — when you are able."

"Is Robert Granger here?"

"No — *no!*" cried Isabel.

"Who is taking care of the children? The water —"

"Cousin Robert is with the children. He is very careful. He won't let them go on the water till I — till you are there."

"Who is at the office?"

"Miss Dobson is looking after the office."

"I thought she was — here."

"She comes and goes," said Isabel candidly.

"She does whatever is needed, wherever it is. She told me to tell you everything is right at the office."

A sigh of relief, so profound, so trusting, that it smote the wife with a poignant pang, escaped the sick man. It aroused in Isabel the discomforts and perplexities which the emergency had anesthetized in her, and which she had purposely disregarded while she must. How had it been possible to come to any sort of understanding with Alicia Dobson when the practical conduct of the situation depended upon the capable, the wonderful girl?

It had been Alicia who thought of everything. It had been Alicia who collected servants, who reconnected wires, who managed Dennis, who ordered supplies, who set awhirling the wheels of daily life in the dismantled house. Everything that it was impossible for the stricken wife to remember was done before the nurses arrived at their posts. She had not been forced to leave Gilbert by one paltry care, by one distracting duty; and for this — Oh, for this, she knew that she should always bless the girl, whatever might happen in the end. It was Alicia who telephoned to Paradise Point and brought the messages from the children that pleased their father so. It was Alicia who summoned the absent partner to the business which she had so competently

guarded — she hurrying from the office to the house, and back again, twenty times a scorching day. It was Alicia — never once intruding, never putting herself where she should not be — who had lifted the household and the business, a dead load, while husband and wife, hand clasped in hand, came slowly from the cañon of shades up into the living air.

It was not easy to speak to Alicia. Yet Isabel knew that the thing must be done; and she was, in a measure, relieved that one comfortable afternoon, when Hosmer was doing well, the stenographer herself asked for an interview downstairs. Isabel descended to the library as obediently (she thought) as she had deferred to the wishes of this young woman in every respect, since she came to her own house. There seemed to be some person in the drawing-room, Mrs. Hosmer observed; but the matter did not interest her and she made no inquiries. She shut the library door, and began by saying: —

"Miss Dobson, we are under great obligations to you. I have had no opportunity — all this while. I feel that I ought to thank you."

"On the contrary," replied Alicia abruptly, "I have felt that it was *I* who should thank *you*."

"I do not understand," answered Mrs. Hosmer, with some stiffness.

"For the way you have treated me, I mean.

Some women would not — You never so much as asked me how I came to be where I was, Mrs. Hosmer."

"I did not think it necessary," came coldly from Mrs. Hosmer.

"I had got so anxious — and Dennis came home. We took the keys — some one advised me not to wait any longer. We had just come in. I made one serious mistake. I ought to have brought a doctor with us, anybody I could pick up. I hope you will believe that I did try to do the best I could."

Mrs. Hosmer made no reply. She seemed to be fathoming her mind for words which she had meant to utter, but had lost.

"I want to thank you," continued Alicia Dobson, "for the confidence you have shown in me — from beginning to end."

Mrs. Hosmer remained sunken in a silence which might have meant anything, — the severest displeasure, or the serenest reconciliation with the facts. Dreamily she heard Alicia's rising voice: —

"Oh, I know! Don't suppose I *don't* know how people think of us. We are used to being slurred and laughed at — the newspaper jokes — the whole wretched, insulting thing! And their wives go off and leave us — and them — and we pull through these dreadful summers when it

seems as if the office were a desert island in a fiery ocean — nobody else left. And we try; any decent girl tries to make it less hard for him in little ways; we're human, the same as you are — and they are — and I was so anxious about him. But I did n't dare to show it. There's a wall in Mr. Hosmer you can't find a gate to. If there were more like *him*, there'd be fewer foolish girls. Mrs. Hosmer, I made another mistake. I ask your pardon for it. I ought to have told you how badly off he was before I did. But once — a year or so ago — I telephoned you, and you did not like it. I was afraid to vex you."

"You are a good girl," said Isabel brokenly. "You are a good, kind girl. I respect you and I thank you from my heart."

She held out her hand, and Alicia took it in her straightforward manner, like a man; as if she sealed a bargain. She stood very erect in her white summer dress. Her brows had their modest look under her plainly brushed hair. The fact that she wore no pompadour seemed to Mrs. Hosmer to give the girl a distinction that accounted for almost anything.

"Harry!" Alicia called unexpectedly. "Will you come here a minute?"

It struck Isabel like a scene-shift in a pretty play that the drawing-room door should open, and a tall young man with an assured manner

should quietly enter the library. It was plain that he was prepared for the summons, and that he responded to it eagerly.

"This is my friend, Mr. Schauffler, Mrs. Hosmer," said Alicia, shining. "He is a lawyer — he used to be one of Mr. Hosmer's young men. We are to be married some day."

"Not later than Christmas," interrupted Harry Schauffler, quite definitely.

"Don't you remember him?" asked Alicia, evidently hurrying to the climax of her little scene. "He came with me that day — that morning; he stood in the hall as you passed by. You thought he was a nurse or — worse. He advised me — I have great confidence in Mr. Schauffler's judgment, Mrs. Hosmer. I am very glad to have you meet him."

"No doubt Mr. Hosmer has already congratulated you both — as I do," began Isabel cumbrously. Her head whirled. She experienced an awkward feeling, a sense of being untrained or unfinished, before these toilers of the desk.

"No," replied Alicia, "I had not told him. I was going to — when he felt better. But he was so tired, and I was afraid — we were afraid — that he might be sorry to have me go. I understand his business so well. And I've been there so long."

"No one can take your place to him!" cried Mrs. Hosmer heartily.

"Nor yours," breathed Alicia Dobson, in a delicate, womanly undertone. She started to say: "If you only knew what you could do!" But the lady in her held her back.

Hosmer convalesced more slowly than he might have done, and Isabel knew her moments of defeat, and sometimes hours of sad perplexity. Although she absorbed herself in his needs with almost a bridal devotion, she felt on his part the lack of a natural appreciation of her belated attentions. She attributed this to the languors of a slow recovery. When she urged upon him an effort to get to Paradise Point, he shook his head.

"Too far, Isabel. I'm not strong enough."

"In a special car? And the doctor would go with us? And Doto and Bert want so much to see you! Besides, you will never get well in this terrible town. It's too hot."

"I'm used to it, you see," he returned, with a frail smile. "I've become a waffle, such as you used to talk about; shut in an iron; baked brown, baked through; I don't suppose I really know how hot it is. And I am — Isabel, I am pretty weak yet. Please don't bother me," he added feebly.

Isabel was conscious of being entangled in mental and moral machinery that she did not know how to handle. She was accustomed to an

adoring husband. How was she to treat an unresponsive one? She had flown to him on the wings of the most self-forgetting emotion of her life; he had received her languidly. She would have wasted herself for his recovery; she lavished herself for his comfort; he accepted her torrent of tenderness without undue surprise, or any particularly touching gratitude. She had anticipated some beautiful scenes between them, some affectionate dénouement such as one would find in a magazine tale which properly reunited married lovers. None occurred. Gilbert was a good deal absorbed in the details of convalescence, and he worried more than was best for him about his business. Now and then he dictated a letter or so to Alicia Dobson. Isabel narrowly watched for the effects of these professional interviews, but she could not see that there were any effects. She admitted to herself generously that Alicia did not count one way or the other in the matter. Simply, Gilbert was yet too sick to get well. The situation remained at this gauge until one day in early August the wife came in and sat down upon the side of his bed and began without preliminaries: —

"Gilbert, to-morrow the doctor is coming to get you off. He says it won't do for you to stay here another day. The nurse will go, of course. Alicia and Harry Schauffler will help. Every-

thing is arranged. The automobile will be here at eleven."

"But I don't *like* Paradise Point!" pleaded the sick man. "I won't go!" he added, with a healthy vigor. Then Isabel laughed.

"You dear old goose! You have n't *got* to. It's only Appleton Landing. I've taken a cottage."

"Not — " he interrupted, with a delightful eagerness.

"But yes, it is! It is our own old blessed cottage. Think of the luck! Less than an hour's sail — and cool as heaven. Alicia fixed the lease. Alicia opened the house. Alicia has got everything ready. The children are there. We thought you'd want to see them. Robert brought them yesterday. But Robert will go right back at once. I'm not sure, but I *think* there's a widow at Paradise Point. She's a Philadelphian, and dresses in the loveliest grays. There are no grays in the country like Philadelphia grays."

Isabel bubbled on anyhow, giving him no time to answer, trying to protect herself from the undertow of feeling that was sweeping her off her feet. When he said: "Our old cottage! That *is* good. That was kind of you, Isabel. I don't know but I could get *there* —" and sat immediately up against the pillows to try his strength, she turned away her face lest he should see that her cheeks were wet.

In spite of herself, determined as she was that there should be no "scene" to hinder him, one cry escaped her: —

"Gilbert! Gilbert! I did n't understand. I do now. I never will leave you again."

"Why, that is kind in you, Isabel," he repeated. He did not dwell upon her kindness; he only patted her arm affectionately, and began to ask questions about Appleton Landing. Isabel understood; she was not dull. Gilbert had endured so much without her that he had now — say the least she might of it — to readjust himself to her. Once he had passionately and persistently, the whole soul and body of him, sought her ideal. The facts of her had been of her own making, and he had accepted them magnanimously. But now she felt that the two had curiously and subtly changed places. With the sense of being apprenticed to an alien art, she perceived that she must woo her husband.

Fortified with this philosophy, Isabel eagerly, if plaintively, took her place that evening in the sick-room, the nurse being off duty until midnight. Hosmer was quiet, and she had thought him asleep until he asked: "Have n't I seen that dress before?"

She hurried to apologize: "It 's years and years old — just a wrapper I used to wear when the children were babies. I don't know why I

kept it. It's all crushed — ragged, too, and see how yellow! I have n't got my trunks yet — and I've used up pretty much everything. I'm sorry to look so shabby. I need a uniform, don't I?"

She drifted towards him in her old white mother's gown; then she paused uncertainly. Gilbert held out his thin hand.

"Oh, Isabel!" he cried, "come here!"

TWENTY-FOUR: FOUR

Mrs. Fortitude Fillebrown had neuralgia at the base of the brain, and Melissy Pulsifer had sent for the doctor. When Melissy experienced a similar disorder she called it a headache behind. But Mrs. Fillebrown had neuralgia at the base of the brain.

Now it snowed — only a New England February knows *how* it snowed — and the road to the village was blocked. Melissy got badly drabbled wading over to Silas Whey's to ask Silas to send Adoniram out with old Peter Parley to bring the doctor. Melissy came home soaked.

"You'll be down yourself," sighed Mrs. Fillebrown. "We might die here for all anybody would know or care."

"I 've got my bitters," said Melissy dryly.

"Then you have to recover from the bitters," suggested Melissy's employer, with the tinge of sarcasm which a neuralgic diathesis lends to the workings of the most literal mind.

One does not say Melissy's "mistress." Melissy was a Yankee and a neighbor. She did not serve. She "accommodated." But she had accommodated Mrs. Fillebrown affectionately for

nearly ten years — ever since Joe Fillebrown died, and was buried in Northwest Peony churchyard, and Mrs. Fillebrown had erected a dutiful slab of Rutland marble to his not altogether blessed memory.

There is no fidelity more attractively loyal than the fidelity of an American domestic, when one is privileged to command a good specimen of intelligence and energy. Mrs. Fillebrown had been thus fortunate. The two women had grown fond of each other, as solitary women do (unless they hate) in silent, manless country homes, where the little that life has to offer is shared and made the most of with pathetic and democratic interest.

"It *dooz* snow," observed Melissy, looking out of the window at the white whirlwind. It swept, a revolving wall, solid and sardonic, between the two women and their nearest neighbor. It seemed to shut them apart from all the world.

"It's reely r'arin' up," said Melissy. "I guess the doctor 'll hev high jinks wallerin' through them drifts along by Silas's."

Mrs. Fillebrown groaned. Melissy Pulsifer would have dug her way through the snow to the village on her hands and knees if she could have cured the base of Mrs. Fillebrown's brain. But in that finer activity which we call tact, Melissy

did not excel. Mrs. Fillebrown thought that this was because Melissy was too healthy.

It grew later, and late. It grew dull, and dusk. The doctor did not come. The storm increased viciously. The drifts began to block the back yard, an ominous garrison, tall and impregnable, piling against the shed; and over towards Silas Whey's the road lay even and high, winding like a white, unbroken river to the unseen town.

Adoniram and Peter Parley had not been known to return. The stanch old-fashioned house, dating from the days when carpenters built "on honor," trembled through all its oaken skeleton. Now and then plaster rattled from somewhere overhead; a blind broke loose in the kitchen, and swung slapping till it smashed the window-pane. When Melissy went to fix it, she came back covered with snow.

"Do brush it off!" complained Mrs. Fillebrown. "You look like a dead person. Is n't that doctor in sight yet?"

"I've het you up some beef tea," replied Melissy, cheerfully.

It was growing quite dark in the sitting-room. Melissy pugnaciously delayed to light the lamps, showing therein the possession of more delicacy of imagination than we gave her credit for.

" She don't know how late it is," thought Melissy. "And there ain't no call she should."

The faces of the two women stood out like satin masks, white above their dark dresses, in the gathering dusk. Their forms were scarcely visible to each other. Neither spoke. The maid stood by the window, staring out. The mistress, from the lounge, where she lay covered with the blue and red afghan that Melissy crocheted at Christmas, watched her.

Mrs. Fillebrown thought how important Melissy was to her. There was no one else — she had nobody else in the world. This seemed worse sometimes than neuralgia at the base; and Mrs. Fillebrown's imagination could no further go.

Her face twitched with two kinds of pain, — the one that the doctor prescribed for, when he could get there, and the one that no doctor could cure. She had been a handsome woman when Joe Fillebrown courted her; trouble had taken her color and contour, but had left her fineness of feature, and that carriage of the head which only a woman who is or once was beautiful ever has.

Now Melissy had never been handsome. But there was a look about her kind eyes and resolute wide mouth that seemed beautiful to the other lonely woman, as Melissy stood sturdily challenging the storm for the first symptom of the doctor's approach.

"'T ain't no use," said Melissy, suddenly, at

last. "He's blocked. We've gotter make a night on't without him. I'll het you up the soapstones, and get you to bed, and set by you. I can sleep in my blanket-wrapper as comf't'ble as they make 'em. There ain't no use mincin' of it. He ain't a-comin'. He's wallerin' on the road somewheres with Adoniram and Peter Parley."

She smoothed her white apron over her chocolate calico dress, drew the curtains decidedly, and lighted the double burner with the blue crêpe-silk shade. The faces of the two women took on a moribund hue in the cold color of the lamp.

Melissy's prophecy, as is not at all sure to be the case with the pessimism of optimistic people, proved accurately correct. The doctor did not get through till daylight; and Mrs. Fillebrown's neuralgia, with the eccentricity characteristic of that wilful disorder, had fled before him.

She was so much better when he dug his way to her front gate that she was delightfully cross. The doctor treated the symptom gleefully, as he would the squalls of a convalescent baby.

"I won't go through another such night, not even to please Providence!" snapped Mrs. Fillebrown. "We might starve, or freeze, or be murdered in our beds here — for all Northwest Peony. It's no sort of way to live. I'm going to have a man in the house if I live till the snow-plough gets out!"

"There ain't nobody but Adoniram and old Mr. Ginger. He's deef as a seraphim on a gravestone, and drags on the left side sence he had his stroke," remarked Melissy. "An' I 'd like to know how long you 'd hev Adoniram perfumin' up this house — feelin' the way you do about caows."

"Have a telephone," suggested the doctor, with the cosmopolitan air that he wore when he had been to Boston, and felt that he was what he called "in touch with the world." "It is cheaper than a man, and more protection. You are quite able, Mrs. Fillebrown, to afford these modern improvements. Really, I should feel much easier about you."

These last words touched Mrs. Fillebrown; for the doctor, with the emotional economy of his kind, was not lavish of his sympathy. She said to Melissy twice that day, "The doctor says he should feel easier about me."

She told Mrs. Whey so, when that good neighbor came in after the storm to verify the startling rumor that Mrs. Fillebrown had ordered a telephone put up in her bedroom, possible burglars and actual neuralgia being offered as the chief excuses for this incredible act. Silas came himself, and Mrs. Fillebrown's lawyer, Wiley X. Toyl; the minister's wife, the grocer from Peony Centre, the dressmaker, the sweet-potato man, and four of Mrs. Fillebrown's Sunday-school

class. Mrs. Fillebrown had not received so many calls — who could say when? She grew quite chatty and cheerful. She was not used to being an object of public interest or attention.

"I have signed the contract," she said, "under Mr. Wiley X. Toyl's advice. The instrument is to go in next week. The doctor says he shall feel so much easier about me."

She repeated this phrase with a pathetic comfort at which it is not easy for a fine sympathy to smile. She was so starved for common human affection that she eagerly devoured the professional substitute for it — that pseudo-sympathy, that discreet dose of friendly interest, which is all that so many ailing and lonely women get from any source. Not that there was the palest tinge of sentiment in the attitude of her mind towards her doctor. She would as soon have thought of romancing about Silas Whey, or even old Mr. Ginger. She was an experienced, indeed a cynical widow, holding all masculine admiration at a cold distance; and the doctor was the infatuated bridegroom of a brand-new second wife. But he was the only person in the world (except Melissy) who knew how Mrs. Fillebrown felt, was sorry, and sometimes said so.

Most of us learn some one lesson out of life's primer better than all the rest put together. Many of us study it in the form of a reiterated

or monotonous trouble by which the unseen Power seems trying to screw some particular idea into our dull heads. Fortitude Fillebrown had learned the weakness of man, and what it means to woman. We might add that she had discovered the incurability of neurotic disorders; but that is secondary. You have seen carpenters forcing "bits" into hard wood, and have watched the shrinking, shrieking fibre as the tool bores its way. Supplant the wood by the living human brain, and that is neuralgia. But the boring, physical agonies of all the years of her lonely life, in which she had so little else to think of except the bit and the bore, were transport beside that other kind of pain which a strong and loving woman endures when she first admits to herself that the man she loves does not deserve her warm and wasted trust, and that her marriage is a definite mistake.

It had come gradually to Fortitude Fillebrown, as the consciousness of most such misfortunes comes. There was the slight but growing neglect, the intermittent tenderness, the increasing absence from home, the sharp and sharper word, the cooling indifference, unrecognized by the man himself, the occasional, then the frequent domestic "scene."

When he lost his situation (Joe was a railroad man), from that sheer carelessness of tempera-

ment which we hesitate to call shiftlessness when we find it in one we love, she did not take the incident too much to heart. She owned their pretty home, and had enough for two to live on, with the old-fashioned economy to which her father had trained her. (He was master of the Peony Centre High School, and had written an arithmetic successful in its day.) But Joe liked other ways. He developed habits as foreign to her simple ideas as the *milieu* of Monte Carlo. It took her a long time to understand what these meant. The wife is the last person to hear the truth about the life of a dissipated man. Rumors reached her on vague wings, and she buffeted them away as if they had been bats. But one night he came home unmistakably and savagely drunk.

From that hour she began to cast up the black items in the long sum by which a woman tries to solve the problem — given dead honor and dying love, how preserve enough happiness to keep alive on and save a home?

"Give me time, Forty," Joe said, in one of his best moments, "and I'll come out right yet. You're quick, my girl, you know. Let a fellow have his rope, and don't yank him in and give him up because he tugs on it. I'm not *all* bad yet, Forty. Be patient with me, girl, as long as you *can* — won't you?"

Joe wore upon his watch-guard a little iron Greek cross that his wife had put there once to signalize some one of his repentant vows to be or do something that she had asked him, and when he said this, Joe fingered the iron cross nervously. He always did the day after a spree. The trinket grew to have a sickly association in her mind with the piteous reaching out of irreclaimable weakness after strength which it is too weak to know that it cannot command.

Patient at first she was, or she thought she was; it amounted to the same thing in her mind, if not in Joe's. But, as Joe said, Fortitude was "quick." The recorder of her history does not claim that she was a perfect wife. There are some women nearly that; one wonders at their number.

But Fortitude Fillebrown was more human than superior — a loving, impulsive, warm-hearted, quick-tongued woman. She found it hard to forgive. Things rankled. She brooded. Sometimes she nagged. Her sense of outraged womanhood was stronger in her than the warm, maternal pity for a man, which is often the sweetest thing in the wife of a better husband than Joe Fillebrown.

"You women don't understand us men," Joe said, one day, rather drearily.

In short, Fortitude's patience broke when her heart did, and this was bad.

Her courage followed her patience. Bitterly sometimes she gibed at the irony of her own brave name. When things were at their worst she was half conscious that she had not the pluck of women she had read of, or of one or two she had known. But she did not know a great many people. She lived an uneventful life. After Joe died it grew secluded. She dreamed, and remembered, and had neuralgia, and answered Melissy.

Indeed, Joe took himself off in a painful way; and one need not wonder that Fortitude was never quite the woman after that black time that she was before.

Only Melissy ever knew the facts; for Melissy was in the dining-room putting away the silver, and the door was not latched.

Joe had come home very drunk the night before; had slept through the stupor which disgusts a woman with his sex in a way that no man can ever understand, and was "coming to," after supper, in a ferocious mood. He had put on his hat to go out again. His wife remonstrated. He turned and clinched his fist, and without a moment's hesitation brought it down on her neck and shoulders. It was the first time he had ever struck her. She cried out, and he struck her again.

She staggered, and her face turned a terrible

color. She was not hurt much — in her flesh — a mere bruise that passed away next day. But her heart received a mortal wound.

All the pride of her sex, her maiden years, her father's name, her wifehood — its outraged fidelity and tenderness — leaped up. She walked with a firm step to the front door and opened it. She stretched her hand out — she had a hand with a fine profile — and pointed into the dark.

"Go!" she articulated distinctly.

"Very well," said Joe; "that'll suit me. The house is yours, as you say."

Now Fortitude had said nothing of the kind. She only stood still — that was all — and pointed through the open door.

Joe gave one sodden glance at her majestic figure; he scarcely raised his eyes to the face, solemn as an antique marble, that frowned above the level of his low gaze. He stood feebly fingering the iron cross upon his watch-chain.

She remembered afterwards that he took off his hat; then he went down the steps. He called back once through the dark, "Good-by, girl."

She did not answer. And she never saw Joe again.

She expected him for a few days, and Melissy set his place at the table every night. But he did not come. And one evening Mrs. Silas Whey came in, with the minister and his wife, and the

three divided between them, as best they could, the news which they bore.

There had been a fire at Peony Centre; it was in a low hotel or boarding-house. Joe was staying there; he had been on a steady spree since he left home. It was a bitter night, and blew a gale. The rustic fire department used up the water-supply, and looked on while the house went down.

Seven people — some men, some women, some drunk, some sober — were smothered or burned.

Joe had got out of the building, it was quite certain. But he was seen to go back.

There was a cry that a little serving-maid, an uncouth, ignorant Swede, but a week in the country, was entrapped and perishing in the attic. It was believed that Joe went back to save the little maid.

They covered his face and brought him home to his wife. His clothes were ashes, but the iron cross on his watch-guard had not burned. Pitiful symbol of the metal that was lacking in the man! Sacred sign of the touch of dedication which transmutes feebler frailty than Joe's into character! Pathetic memory of those unrecorded scenes, those hopes and despairs, those ecstasies and agonies, known only to the dead man and to his living wife!

With her own shaking fingers she removed the

cross from Joe's poor body. From that hour she wore it on a ribbon, out of sight, against her heart. And from that hour she mourned and loved him.

Now Melissy marvelled much at this. A few months after Joe was buried, "I calc'late," said Melissy to herself, "she'd take another lickin' to get him back agin."

When Joe had been dead so many years that Melissy almost lost track of them, "Lordy," thought Melissy, "I calc'late she'd take a lickin' every day to set her eyes on him for a spell."

Melissy supposed it was because she had never been married that she found it so hard to understand the grief of the drunkard's widow. The old maid did not respect the wife altogether for this mystery of conjugal allegiance.

"When a man ain't wuth it," mused Melissy, "he ain't *wuth*."

Melissy welcomed anything, even a modern improvement, that would alleviate the desolation of the house. She was very much interested in the telephone.

"It 's all over taown!" she cried gleefully. "Some they call it onchristian extravagance, and some says the money'd better go to the A.B.C.F. M., or the W.C.T.U., or the Widder's Mite. But Silas Whey he's a-talkin' of puttin' one in himself, an' him a deacon! He says, seein' the poles

run right by, he did n't s'pose the company'd charge nothin' extry. And Wiley X. Toyl, I hear he 's ordered already. You've sot the fashion now, I do declare."

"So it seems," said Mrs. Fillebrown, blushing importantly. "These modern improvements are very interesting."

She went to the post office that morning herself, although the wind was northwest and neuralgic, to mail a letter subscribing to a popular scientific periodical. She felt what she called a mental stimulus quite new to her drowsy and dreamy life.

She was gone some time — so many people stopped her to say how glad they were to see her out, and when was her "instrument" going in? — and when she came home she was surprised to hear voices in the house.

She stepped into the hall softly, and closed the door without noise. Melissy's obvious tones rose with their own familiar positiveness upon her employer's astonished ear.

"You don't catch me! What? *Me?* Put my mouth into that hole? Lordy! give me the cullender and show me how to handle the darn thing. Looks like a tunnel a man had got a patent on without askin' his wife if it would let syrup through. So? I feel like a fritter fried too long. What'll I do *naow?*"

Mrs. Fillebrown walked softly through the dining-room. The door of her bedroom was open. In that sacred apartment boldly appeared Melissy and a man. The "instrument," in the visible form of the neat oaken desk of the long-distance and metallic circuit, stood already in position against the wall.

Melissy sat at the desk. The local manager, in no wise loath to expend the time of the corporation in Melissy's stimulating society, stood twitching an amused mustache behind her. Neither of the two observed Mrs. Fillebrown.

"Now talk," said the affable manager. "Say something."

Melissy put her mouth to the transmitter and the receiver to her ear. She flushed with embarrassment, and sat in abnormal silence.

"Look a-here," said Melissy, meekly. "I can't think of a dumb thing to say."

She laid the receiver down weakly. Her strong red fingers fumbled on the desk.

"Then it's the first time, I'll warrant," suggested the manager, wickedly.

Melissy fired at the fuse. She picked up the receiver stoutly, and in a defiant tone began: —

"Here — you. Hello! Hel — *lo!* Yes. I hear you. Yes, I *said* I heard you. Hel — hum — ho! This corporation 's got an awful sarsy manager. I'll say that for it."

Melissy choked, and sank back.

"Ring up now," directed the manager, amiably. "Call up some one else. You've got to learn."

"I don't know who to call," pleaded Melissy, faintly.

Who had ever seen Melissy embarrassed before? It took the greatest of contemporaneous monopolies to disconcert the Yankee girl who "accommodated" for an income.

"Call up your grocer, and see if there is n't somebody in the store you know," observed the manager, with the ingenuity of his class. "Ask for 32:5."

"32:5!" demanded Melissy, in a fierce and resolute tone. "Mercy to Betsy! he says what do I want. What *do* I want?"

"Tell him you thought your young man was in the store, and you wanted a few words with him," commanded the godless manager.

Now Melissy's head was so muddled by this time that she retained few if any intelligent ideas beyond the conviction that the corporation must be obeyed, on forfeit of the instrument.

Mechanically she repeated the terrible language which the manager put into her mouth. There was a moment's significant silence in the telephone. Then Melissy could hear peals of profane masculine laughter reverberating through the grocery store.

"*I 'll* answer the lady," broke in a sturdy voice. "Hullo, Miss Melissy! I'm proud to talk to ye!"

Melissy's face burned a dark, brick red.

"Child of sin and sorrow!" she gasped. "That's Adoniram Whettlestone! That's Silas Whey's Adoniram! Mercy to Betsy! I never can hold up my head in Northwest Peony again. I'm done for. Adoniram Whey? *Be* you Adoniram Whettlestone?" — "Yes. I hear you. I wisht I did n't." — "No, I did n't. I never did. I'd 'a' died fust. This fellar give me the order of them words. This is the sarsiest corporation I ever — No. I hain't got nothin' to say to you over no blamed Noo York and Noo England Telephone instrumunt. No, sir. You may tell 'em so, too." — "What's that?" — "I'm a-goin' to put this blame thing down offen my ear. I won't hear another word." — "What did you say? I did n't just get that. Say it again. Speak a little louder." — "Mercy to Betsy!"

At this juncture Mrs. Fillebrown made her presence manifest, and Melissy, with a burning face, flew to her for protection. "Take it!" she cried, throwing down the receiver. "Take the blame thing, an' do the foolin' for this here fambly yerself! It's fit to bring scandal on any decent house of women folks!"

With this, weeping for mortification, yet bri-

dling through her tears, Melissy fled from the room.

It was now Mrs. Fillebrown's turn. She sat down with dignity, and picked up the receiver daintily, with her little finger crooked out the way she held a teaspoon in company.

"It is very interesting," she sighed. "Whom shall I talk to?"

"How would the doctor do?" suggested the astute manager.

"Shall I have to pay for a professional call?" asked the lady anxiously. "I have n't got two dollars' worth of neuralgia to-day."

Being reassured on this point, she put her lips to the transmitter and faintly murmured: "Is the doctor in? Somebody says he is n't in," she added, in a disappointed tone. "I think it is his second wife."

"Are you sure it is n't his first?" asked the jocular manager.

"I'm not a spiritualist," replied the new subscriber, with dignity.

The manager, who was no natural fool, perceived that he had unwittingly called out the concealed severity of an amiable woman — had stumbled on the subject of Mrs. Fillebrown's dearest aversion. He murmured a deprecating apology.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Fillebrown, suddenly

blushing. "They say there are twins at the sweet-potato man's, and they can't tell when to expect the doctor."

At this instant the call-bell rang loudly. Mrs. Fillebrown jumped and trembled. The manager explained that this was not her own call, but a chronic interruption to which she was expected to pay no attention.

"Hev we got ter hev that kerjobblin' in our ears night 'n' day?" demanded Melissy at the door. "I'd sooner *hev* twins — or the Last Trumpet."

Four musical rings now pealed prettily through the solemn house.

"You answer it!" pleaded Mrs. Fillebrown. "I feel somehow — it is very foolish, I know — a little afraid of it. Well, if you think it best — Who's that? Doctor? Why, *Doctor!*" Her pale face flushed with pleasure. "Why, I can recognize his voice — that big, bass tone he has when he 's hungry and cross. Doctor? Why, this is delightful. Thank you; I am very much better. I have n't had an attack for ten days. Now, if anything *does* happen, I can call you up, can't I? Two boys, did you say? How interesting! It never occurred to me that a sweet-potato man *could* have twins. I don't think I even knew he was a married man. You see, one thinks of him as a sweet-pota — Yes. Good-by, Doctor. You

are always so kind! He says he shall feel so much easier about me," sighed Mrs. Fillebrown, gently, as she hung the receiver in its place. The manager bowed gravely.

"What have you been doing in the front hall, Melissy?" asked Mrs. Fillebrown, after the representative of the corporation had left the house.

"Oh, nothin'," observed Melissy, carelessly — "only offerin' that fellar a hot apple tart I had."

"Dear me, Melissy! I don't know about that. Is it quite —" Mrs. Fillebrown paused for a word. Had the telephone already begun to corrupt the manners of her irreproachable household?

"Waal," said Melissy, grimly, "I thought he needed a little more sarse. I told him so. I het it up, and put a tablespoonful cayenne pepper inside. Then I stirred in a teaspoonful of my bitters and a little lixypro 'n' some mustard. I told him I was lookin' to get a husband on my repootation for cookin'."

"Mercy on us, Melissy! Did the poor young man eat that tart?"

"A big mouthful!" cried Melissy, savagely. "He took a chaw when he got outside. I seen him."

With this spicy prelude the telephone entered Mrs. Fillebrown's household, and there it had been cherished for nearly a year at the time

when these records find themselves again concerned with it.

It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of this third member of the family. As Melissy said, it was worth twenty men-folks. She said it had better habits, and was more civil. Melissy averred that it was a sight more useful than a husband, and consider'ble less trouble than a family of children.

Mrs. Fillebrown did not say much; but the apparent fact was that the grave without a hope would now have had less terror for her than existence without a telephone connection. The little nickel bell of 24:4 was always tinkling merrily through the lonely house. Business occasions demanding the use of the wire crowded upon the imagination of the subscriber. Friendship, neighborhood, charity, and religion in turn combined their forces to supply Mrs. Fillebrown's telephone with steady occupation. Trade and the professions reinforced each other by keeping the lady busy at her oaken desk. Silas Whey and Wiley X. Toyle added their addresses to the year-book, and their connections to Mrs. Fillebrown's list of electric intimacies. The monthly bills at the grocer's and the butcher's increased so fast that it ceased to be a mystery how these rural tradesfolk could afford telephones. Who could count the unnecessary chops and salads,

the delusive patent soaps and dyspeptic canned things, that got into the kitchen because it was so easy for them to get through the telephone? Equally impossible was it to estimate the social excitements which that "instrument" brought into Mrs. Fillebrown's solitary life. Sitting there alone on wintry days, in her desolate rooms, she visited, she entertained. Across that tiny, trembling wire all her little world came to her, and thereby she ventured out to it.

One day the Northwest Peony Church (having heard it rumored in Boston that the modern improvements in religion called upon all active parishes to keep open church), in a burst of Christian good sense, put a telephone into the vestry. *Then* Mrs. Fillebrown may be said to have begun to live; for then she found her hands and heart full (or, more precisely and telephonically speaking, her ears and mouth full) of the miseries of other people; and her own, like dissolving figures thrown through a stereopticon, retreated gently. In a word, the wife with a history, the widow with a bitter memory filling the place of a holy grief, the nervous invalid, the cynical recluse, had been added to the noble army of women whose romance has been sublimated into sacrifice. It took a year, but at the end of that year she was well on her way to become one of those neighborhood angels who glo-

rify so many of the villages of New England with a gleam of splendid, moral life — some people name it altruism; some prefer an old-fashioned word, and call it Christianity.

24:4 had become the busiest number on the local exchange. The musical bell sang through its glass window at all hours of the day and many of the night. It had become quite the fashion in Northwest Peony to expect Mrs. Fillebrown to "fill up" — to meet those gaps in things which nobody else did or could. Was a watcher needed? Was a girl in trouble which only another woman and an older could understand? Was a young fellow bothered about his debts or his class oration? Ring up 24:4! Who will start the subscription to keep a forgotten old lady out of the poorhouse? Who will help out at the minister's while his wife brings the new baby into the world at the precise time when the other children have the measles? Who will look after those girls whom a drunken father sold to a Russian Finn? Or that boy who has been all winter with no flannels, and one old jacket over his little cotton shirt? Call up 24:4!

"We'll have to charge you hotel rates, Mrs. Fillebrown, if this goes on," said the manager, soothing his mustache. But he would n't have done it for his situation. He was proud of 24:4. Most people in Northwest Peony were. When

three calls on this busy number came in one week from the Fresh-air Fund, and one from the State Industrial School, and another from the Women's Prison, the manager felt that his most important subscriber reflected credit on the exchange and on the corporation.

One night in early January Mrs. Fillebrown was very tired. She had been answering the bell all day when she was in, and it had been calling snappily for her all the time she was out. It was late. Melissy had gone to bed with a toothache. The house was quiet. The yard and street were still with the heavy stillness of a windless, winter night when the thermometer is low, and the moon is on the snow.

The last calls of a busy day were over. She had directed Wiley X. Toyl to pay the coal bill that he disputed for those poor Portuguese who had the grippe. She had told the dressmaker not to put on that expensive trimming. She had asked Mrs. Silas Whey how Silas's throat was, and was n't there anything she could do? Oh, and how was Peter Parley's left hind ankle? She had ordered lemons from the grocer's for Rebecca at the Well. She had ordered extract of beef from the druggist's for the wife of the sweet-potato man, who had blessed the sweet-potato man and shocked the village by adding a cross-eyed, red-haired girl to her year-old twins.

Mrs. Fillebrown had told one of her Sunday-school scholars how to break an engagement, and another how to trim a bonnet. She had talked quite a while with the minister about the Junior Endeavor Convention, and as long again with his wife about the baby's croup and the little girl's composition. She had asked the doctor what she should do for Melissy's wisdom-tooth, and now she had hung the receiver up, and was lying on the lounge in the sitting-room under Melissy's blue and red afghan.

In one respect alone, it should be said, 24:4 had proved an astonishing disappointment to its subscriber. So little occasion to summon the doctor had lately arisen that Mrs. Fillebrown sometimes felt as if the final cause of her connection with the corporation had been defeated. Beyond a word in behalf of Melissy's toothache, or a prescription for old Mr. Ginger's "left side," or a friendly suggestion what to do for those girls in the parish who were making themselves pre-eminent by eating slate-pencils and chewing the margins of the religious newspapers, the doctor had found limited professional occupation over the wires of 24:4.

Mrs. Fortitude Fillebrown had grown round and rosy, cheerful and calm. The electric spark which completed her circuit with the warm, human world had brought into her life as much as it carried out.

If Mrs. Fillebrown was not quite a well woman, or if she never would be, she was too busy a one to have the time to know it; and on this particular evening it was an angry surprise suddenly to find that old bit boring "at the base of the brain." She met the fact with that exasperated scorn by which the mind receives those foes of the body which it believed itself to have routed. She would not telephone for the doctor — she set her teeth and clenched her hands and lay still. She felt as ashamed as if neuralgia had been a felony.

"I am only tired out," she said.

The call-bell rang, and she rose wearily to answer it. A young mother in the village who had lost her little girl that winter was going to Boston to consult a spiritualistic medium to-morrow. She telephoned to ask Mrs. Fillebrown to go with her.

"Not a step!" snapped Mrs. Fillebrown, with the decision of a kindly woman whose pet antipathy is unexpectedly aroused. "I won't go an inch with you on any such fool of an errand! You stay at home, Alicia, and say your prayers, and take round the subscription for the Orphans' Home, and put poor little Allie's dresses in a Home Missionary barrel. That's all I've got to say to *you!*"

She came back to the lounge, and crept under

the blue and red afghan rather weakly. Indeed, she was tired — soul and body; tired out. She had reached one of those crevices to be found on the steeps of the most noble of lives, where sacrifice itself takes on the weariness and doubtfulness of all human endeavor, and where the climb seems hardly worth the muscle. To crawl in and stop seemed just for that one hour the intelligent thing to do.

Suddenly, as she lay there in this supine mood which all strong beings know but few talk about, it seemed to her that she would give the whole — the whole brave, lonely play — for one of her husband's kisses.

This pang of womanly weakness surprised Mrs. Fillebrown the more because she really had thought so little about Joe for some time past. She was rather glad when the telephone rang again, and she had to stagger into the bedroom to answer it. The summons came from the manager, who wished to know how she liked the looks of her name and number on the new year-book, and regretted that he should not have the pleasure of serving so valuable a subscriber much longer. He was going to marry a Boston operator, and expected to be promoted to a city exchange.

She had not left the desk before the bell struck once more, and Mr. Adoniram Whettlestone presented his compliments to Miss Melissy Pulsifer,

and would like to know if she received that evening.

"She's gone to bed with a toothache, Adoniram," said Mrs. Fillebrown, patiently. "And I must say I should be obliged to you if you would n't call us up again to-night. It is the seventh time to-day, and, really, I must have a little rest myself. If you want Melissy, come after her, man-fashion; but I can't do second-hand courting over the telephone for a steady occupation."

It seemed hardly worth while to go back into the sitting-room after this, and Mrs. Fillebrown lay down on her bed, too tired and too ill either to undress or sit up. It must have been half-past nine o'clock when the bell rang with a loud, imperious cry.

"Well?" said Mrs. Fillebrown, wearily. (A subscriber seldom says hilloa.)

"Mrs. Fillebrown," replied the manager, in the voice of an operator moved with the unexpected importance of a country exchange, "here's a long-distance call for you."

"Who is it?" asked Mrs. Fillebrown, with reviving interest.

"I don't know. It is a call from Chicago."

"Must be some mistake. I don't know anybody in Chicago."

"There is no mistake. The call is from Chi-

cago — 24:4 — Mrs. Fortitude Fillebrown. No mistake at all. I will shut everything else off, and keep the wire clear for you. Speak distinctly, but don't holler. Line connected."

"Good-evening, Chicago," cried Mrs. Fillebrown, thickly, at the top of her lungs.

"Are *you* Northwest Peony, 24:4?"

"Yes."

"Is this Mrs. Fillebrown's house?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Fortitude Fillebrown's?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Joseph Fillebrown's?"

"This is the house."

"Are *you* Mrs. Fortitude Fillebrown?"

"I am the lady."

"*Forty!*" called a voice from space, tremulously, "don't you know me?"

The receiver shook in Mrs. Fillebrown's hand. Her face and neck went a mortal color. Women have dropped dead from far less shocks.

"No," she said, after a moment's terrible silence, "I do not know you."

"Very well," from a thousand miles away replied the voice, in disappointment so evident as to have something piteous about it — "Very well, that will suit me."

"*Who* are you?" gasped Mrs. Fillebrown, now in great agitation.

"I used to be Joe," said the unseen, more quietly. He spoke with remarkable distinctness and power of tone. The conversation which followed took place without more difficulty than Mrs. Fillebrown might have experienced in calling up Boston in a snowstorm or a gale. "Now listen to me closely, Forty. It's a long pull, and you'll have to give trained attention."

"I am listening. I am attending closely."

"So you say — Joe died?"

"Joe died, and I buried him."

"Good riddance, was n't it? Got along better without him, did n't you, girl? Would n't want me back if you could get me, would you?"

"Are you Joe's ghost? For God's sake, *what* are you?"

"Would n't want him round again, did you say? Forty! Forty! *tell* a fellow! What's that? Did you say you 'd be willing to take him back?"

"I 'd thank God for the chance!"

"Rich or poor?"

"Rich or poor."

"Lucky or unlucky?"

"Lucky or unlucky."

"Good or bad?"

"Good or bad."

"Dead or living?"

"Dead or living," said the widow, solemnly.

"I'd bless God for the chance to take my poor husband back."

"Then I'll call again," replied the voice from the winter night. "Good-by."

Silence succeeded. She strained her throat in calling, her ears in listening. No words followed. The wire roared in the frosty atmosphere.

"Finished!" cried the manager. She hung up the receiver, and for the first time in her life Mrs. Fillebrown fainted quite away.

She was a woman used to keeping her own counsel, and she told no person what had happened to her. When she came to her senses, lying stiff and uncovered there across her bed in the winter night, she found herself quaking with that terror which is not of this earth nor of its laws. For her hand touched the iron cross, cold upon her bosom beneath her loosened dress. The incredible significance of this little circumstance struck her chill and dumb.

Joe was dead. She had buried him. Her own hands had taken the trinket from his poor burned body.

Then *who* had tampered with the half-understood electric powers which men fancied themselves to have controlled? Then *what* had called to her across a thousand miles of winter night?

She thought, with a sudden flame upon her

ashy cheeks, how impatient she had been with that woman whose little girl was dead. Suppose she had gone to the Boston medium with Alicia?

"Perhaps I should have found out — something," she thought vaguely. Then, with the natural energy of a practical woman who has a morbidness in a healthy direction, she scorned herself for the thought. Towards all other human weakness trouble had taught her to be motherly and tolerant; but with the feebler side of mysticism, taken in the only form in which she knew it, that of the lower, vulgar order of séances and rappings and communications, she had never felt even a civil patience.

Now she trembled before a mystery more incredible, more unreasonable, than any tale of the dusk which she had ever read or heard.

"Such things are phenomena," she said. For she had been reading the scientific magazine to which she had subscribed.

The next night she locked herself in with her telephone, but the "phenomena" were not repeated. The night after and the day and night following passed without event. Mrs. Fillebrown dared not go out of hearing of the call-bell of 24:4. She shut herself into the house, and sent Melissy on all the errands, real and imaginary, which she found it possible to invent.

On the third night Adoniram was in the

kitchen, and Melissy was thoroughly preoccupied. Mrs. Fillebrown was alone in her sleeping-room, with the bolt drawn. The lamp with the ghastly blue-silk shade was burning, and in its deadly color the widow, in her black dress, sat stolidly. No call had come in since supper. Mrs. Fillebrown watched the telephone with eyes in which there was more terror than longing. At half-past nine she fancied that she saw the bell quiver behind its glass case. Then it struck.

She sprang to the desk. The manager was speaking.

"Mrs. Fillebrown, here's a long-distance call for you again — New York."

"New York?"

"Connected."

With a clearness and distinctness which one might call appalling when one thought of the distance involved, the volume and articulation of voice began: —

"Are you Northwest Peony, 24:4?"

"I am."

"Mrs. Fortitude Fillebrown's?"

"I am Mrs. Fillebrown."

"You are a mighty good operator for a subscriber. Hilloa, girl! Can you hear what I say?"

"I hear perfectly. But I don't know who you are."

"Try again! You've got a good long-distance

wire. You *ought* to recognize a voice no farther than New York City — Say, Forty! Come! Don't you know me?"

The woman's teeth chattered against the edge of the transmitter. Know the voice? Good God! She could not lie to Joe, just because he was a dead man. She *did* know the voice.

It was the voice that had courted her — and the voice that had cursed her. From that voice she had heard tenderness and blasphemy, manly love and unmanly recrimination, sodden song, self-pity, penitence, vows made only to be broken, and, oh, what love-making! Enough to melt and hold the heart of the stoniest woman in the bitter world.

"*Joe!*" she wailed; and three hundred miles of sensitive wire vibrated to her cry.

"Well, well, Forty! Why, girl! Why, my poor girl! Why, I thought — Upon my word, the girl thinks she's talking to a ghost. Say, Forty! I know I *ought* to be dead, but the fact is — can you make out to bear it? — you see, I'm *not*."

"Joe Fillebrown!" called the widow, with an access of moral and physical strength, "just because you're a dead spirit, you need n't take advantage of a poor live woman to deceive her. . . . I took the iron cross off your burned corpse, and it's hanging around my neck."

"Whe–ew! You did, did you? I say, Forty!

You always *were* almighty clever. I guess that evidence would hold in any court — and he'd be no kind of a ghost who did n't lose his case on it."

"Well, then!" cried the widow, in uncanny triumph. She felt an awful exaltation. She wondered what Alicia would say to this tremendous thing. How petty, how paltry, all those vulgar Boston "manifestations" seemed beside her own elect experience!

"Forty!" called the voice from New York, in a strange, changed tone. "Girl, I hate to disappoint you. But it is n't true."

"*What* is n't true?"

"You took the cross off the wrong fellow."

But now from 24:4 there came no reply.

"Forty! Has somebody cut us off?"

"No; we are not cut off."

"I say, Forty! You see, I was a little tight that night, and this chap, he won at poker — and I was short of funds. . . . I *was* short, you know, occasionally, those days. So I was too tight to know any better — and I think I must have given him my watch."

"*You — gave away — my iron cross?*"

The words came with terrible distinctness. That little offence seemed worse to the woman at that moment than abuse, desertion, or death.

"Well," said the voice from New York, "have n't I been punished enough? *I* was n't

coming back to disgrace you! I meant — why, girl, don't you see? — I meant to try my hand at making a man of myself. It took a good while. I was going to make sure of it first."

Dead silence answered.

"If I have n't done that, I've done the next thing to it," urged the voice that was, but could not be, Joe's voice. "I've been manager of a big Western exchange. I telephone. That's my business. I can have any position I want. I'm doing well, Forty. And I have n't got drunk for six years and three months. I meant to serve seven steady years for you; but ten years without you (drunk or sober) is a good while, and — I could n't stand it any longer, girl. I've got to that pass."

Then over the New York wire there broke the strangest message which that great line had ever known. It was the inarticulate pleading of a woman's sobs. They came one upon another far down from the depths which strong women never fathom in their own griefs — agonized entreaties, protests, appeals from fate to Heaven, and perhaps God knows what unuttered or unutterable forebodings.

"Oh, Forty! Why, Forty! Why, my poor girl! If you feel so badly — as *that!* — I won't bother you, my dear. I won't disgrace you. I meant to come home — when I'd made a man of myself,

when I could make up to you for what happened; but I — can — give it — up. I'll go back. I meant to take — the first train — to you."

"Joe! *Joe!* As soon as I *can* speak — Joe! Oh, for God's sake, *don't* let anybody cut us off *now!*"

"Forty! Do you want me? Did you say you did? Don't you bother about the wire. I'd like to see 'em cut off a manager on a D. H. message! Did you say you *wanted* me? Then, I swear, all hell shan't keep me! I'll be with you — dead or living — by to-morrow night!"

The communication shut down. Silence put her delicate finger upon the throbbing wire. The receiver fell from Mrs. Fillebrown's hand. She sat staring about her lonely room. She got up and snatched off the blue lamp-shade; she hated the color suddenly. She wondered where that rose-red one had gone to that Joe used to like.

All the next day she lived in one of those sublimated dreams which make it possible for one to understand what it may be like to be a disembodied creature. Cherishing the thrilling secret, which still she did not dare to share with any living, she trod the floors of her house as if they had been floating clouds.

Melissy watched her; the Yankee girl's jaw dropped. "What in mercy to Betsy's got ye? There ain't no comp'ny comin'. Ain't this here house clean enough for you? And I'd like to

know what you're a-movin' round the furnitoor in your room for. That bureau hain't stood there sence Mr. Fillebrown was buried. Why, that old red silk quilt's ben in the rag-bag this five year! Be you out of your senses?"

But Mrs. Fillebrown stared at Melissy solemnly. The question troubled her. Perhaps she was. She would not talk to Melissy. She spent the day in putting little things as Joe used to fancy them.

Towards night she got into a white cashmere tea-gown that she sometimes wore, with black ribbons. She sent Melissy to a Christian Endeavor meeting with Adoniram Whey, and herself remained alone in the house.

The evening trains came in and went out. Time to ride, to walk, to crawl from the station elapsed. The last train roared down the valley. Wheels were heard; they passed the house. It came on to be nine o'clock. Her pale lips moved stiffly.

"If there's anything *to* it, he'll call me up again." But he did not call her up again. She sat by her telephone all night long. The bell did not ring. . . . There was nothing to it.

Joe was dead; and she had been fooled, like the weakest of women, by a "manifestation."

"It is nothing but a modern improvement in spiritualism," she thought coldly.

In the morning she put on her black dress again, and carried her insomniac face proudly to the breakfast table, where Melissy took one look at it, and rang up the doctor immediately.

But Mrs. Fillebrown said nothing to the doctor. He prescribed for neuralgia at the base of the brain. She looked at him, and said, "Thank you, doctor," and he went away.

A week passed; two; four. No more long-distance messages came to the Peony Centre exchange for 24:4. Mrs. Fillebrown eyed her telephone with a sick horror, as she might some evil spirit that had conspired with all that was freakish and weak in Joe to work her this unutterable misery.

One night, at a late hour, it being nearly twelve of the clock, she lay in bed with the light burning. She could not sleep. Then, suddenly, while she lay watching the nickel bell through its glass protector, it rang. It rang with the wilful and commanding peal familiar to the business in the transmission of messages from officer to operator of the line.

In her night-dress as she was, she leaped to the receiver; and through it, as before, came the prudent prelude:

"Is this 24:4, Peony Centre?"

"It is."

"Is this Mrs. Joseph Fillebrown's?"

"I am Mrs. Fortitude Fillebrown."

"Forty! . . . I'm almost home. I'm in Boston."

"I hear you —" coldly.

"Girl, I've been sick —"

"Yes. I hear what you say."

"On my honor, Forty! I was n't well when I started. I only got so far and stopped. I've had pneumonia at the City Hospital. I've been delirious. I could n't get to you."

"Lord have mercy upon me!" wailed Mrs. Fillebrown, piteously. It had all begun over again. Joe had been on a spree.

"*Fortitude Fillebrown!*" A thunderous cry rushed across the wires. "You think I've been drinking again! I say, if you do, I won't come home — I'll never come home till I *am* a ghost. If you can't trust me, girl — *now* — I did my best to get to you, Forty," tremulously. "But I see you don't believe me. Good-by. Good-by, girl — good-by."

"I'll believe in you when I see you," said the widow, stoutly. "It's asking too much of me to believe in deceiving spirits. It is n't Scriptural. You come home, Joe, and give me a chance to believe in you."

"Will you *want* me, Forty?" — timidly.

"Come home and find out for yourself, Joe."

"*Sure* you want me?"

"Sure."

"Poor or rich? Lucky or unlucky?"

"Yes — God knows — yes."

"Sick or well?"

"Sick or well."

"Dead or living?"

"*Dead or living.*"

"Then I'll be there to breakfast," said the unseen.

The message shut off abruptly. But in a few moments the bell called again.

"Forty! I forgot to tell you. I've kept track of you, you know, all this while. I never meant to let you get into any scrape. I was n't so bad as that. And, girl, I can have the exchange at Peony Centre if you'd rather stay on in the old home. It's a small job — there's a bigger in Boston for the taking — but I'd like to please you. Think it over, will you?"

"I'll think it over, Joe."

"And, Forty, girl, do you think you care enough for me" —

"I never cared for any man but you, Joe Fillebrown, in all my life."

— "When I come, if I should want to kiss you, Forty? I might, you know."

"I'll tell you when I see you," said Mrs. Fillebrown, evasively, persisting in the shelter of her phrase.

She went to bed and slept like a little girl. In the morning she woke quietly. Ghost or man, she had somehow ceased to be afraid of Joe. She felt the sacred power of the marriage bond close around her solemnly. Better, oh, best, a thousand times, forever be true wife, let shame, misery, mystery, death, come as they will!

She told Melissy, vouchsafing no explanation of this fearful domestic irregularity, to wait breakfast for a little, and then she opened the front door and looked out.

The first train from the city was screaming down the valley. There would be no cab at the station. She almost wished she had sent Adoniram with old Peter Parley. But then she remembered that one cannot ask the use of a neighbor's carriage to meet a spirit.

She stood in her black dress looking down the road. A man was walking feebly up the little hill. It was slushy, and the walking was hard. He crawled along with bent head. As he came nearer she saw that his hair was gray. Her heart gave one wild leap, and fell. For, oh, Joe's curls were brown as a seal, and as soft! Poor Joe! Dead Joe!

She stepped back into the house. Then, God knew why, she turned.

He had seen her, and, appalled at her abrupt retreat, had stopped there in the snow and

leaned against the fence. He was breathing fast and weakly. It would have taken less than the least of the little whims which control the great decisions of life to make the man turn back.

For it was Joe. And he thought she was ashamed of him, or that she was sorry she had told him to come home.

She ran out into the slush and got to him. He held out his hand, and she put hers into it.

Now at that moment she found these dreadful words in her mind: "This was the hand that struck me."

She looked up into his face. Haggard as it was with mortal sickness, still the firm lines and the direct eye of long abstinence were there. All the witnesses of Joe's face took oath for him.

In hers a solemn jury held its verdict back. A piteous mental confusion ran riot in her. What were those old words about being born again? Her "Scientific Monthly" had omitted to quote them in that strong paper treating of the physiological renewal of the cells conceded to occur once in so many years.

"The hand that did that died. This is a new Joe," she thought. And then she thought no more. But she took his wasted fingers and bent over them, and laid her lips to them and kissed them.

When she saw how sick a man he was, very naturally and quietly she said, "Breakfast is all ready, Joe," just as if nothing had happened, and he had only been out all night, and was sorry, and had come home quite himself.

THE PRESENCE

THERE it is again. No — no. The fire flared; or the screen jarred in the draught — I don't see where that draught comes from! Everything is close, and shut; even the door behind the portières; I drew the curtains myself, because these long, low windows are so treacherous on winter nights. I think everything is colder to a person who sits alone in a room — I don't mean seems to be colder, but is actually so. I suppose human beings are like horses in a barn; several warm the place and are comfortable, but one will shiver. To-night I am cold to the soul.

I am glad that portière is just the dull gold that it is; it fights with firelight so sturdily, and yields so graciously; it has a lambent softness, neither glow nor gleam; he liked it from the day it was hung. His tawny, splendid, blond coloring made it akin to him, I always said. He stood against it like a viking when he came in and looked about the room for me. Sometimes I hid, to tease him. I often teased him — too often, I am afraid. He was not a teasable person; it never amused him, and it sometimes tried him. I begin to see that — now. I begin to see —

There again! Surely, yes! No — ah–h, no. I don't know whether I am most sorry or most glad. If I should *really* see him I might die of fright, I think. And yet, I would sell my soul, my poor, petty, exacting soul, that never has given a blessed thing worth having been created for, to this world — nor to him — alas, never even to him! Sell it? I would throw it away like rubbish on a river if I could know, if I could be perfectly sure, that he were in this room. And if I could know, "past all doubting, truly," that he could understand how I feel *now;* if I could speak, and have any reason to believe that he could hear. But I have n't any — not any at all. I cannot fool myself; I care too much about it. Nor I can't cheat him. A woman may torment a live husband if she wants to. She can't deceive a dead one. He is not any longer at my command. He has escaped me.

Is life deaf? Or is death dumb? What sign language must I learn, to reach him? He was so acute and studious — such a scholar; and I was an ignorant girl — frivolous, foolish. I don't think it would occur to him that I would take the trouble to learn any kind of an unknown language for his sake. Why should it? I never did. What billows of affliction he went through trying to teach me a little Spanish the year we thought of going to Madrid! I acted like a firefly moth;

and I know perfectly well what I mean by that, while I am perfectly conscious that nobody else would know. It is not of the least consequence whether there are such things as firefly moths, either.

But he was patient. He was so patient I could have *screamed*. . . . I never was patient in my life.

. . . Oh, there! Yes — No — Yes, *yes*. The outline forms against the screen; just so I saw it that other night, and once besides; but then it blurred and was not. And now it blurs and will not be. And I shall sit here and stretch my arms out for him, and cry my heart out for him, but it will not form; it will only struggle to be an outline; and it will not succeed. I shall not see him. I must not expect anything, and so I shall not have the disappointment to bear. I am not used to bearing disappointment, and I do it very badly. No, he will not come into this room. I need not look for him, nor call him. . . .

Antone? Antone? Are you there, Antone? Is it you — after all? How still you are, how stony still! How vague you are, like a mist-man — *you!* Why, you were all man — if you did learn languages and study books — and had that dreadful patience; live, warm, real man, every nerve and muscle of you, everything you thought, and felt, and did — you were all real, Antone.

. . . Impossible! This wreath of gray shadow cannot be you. I won't believe it. I won't insult you so. You would be the livest ghost that ever had died. You would —

Strange, it is very strange. It does not melt at all. It is like a sea-fog when the sun shines through it. The power of it persists and holds against the screen, and brightens a little, all the time. The outline sharpens slowly — tall, broad in the shoulders, regal about the head, with that high look you had, and your brown-gold hair and beard . . . your eyes; searching for me? Your arms, oh, your dear arms, groping for me. . . . Antone! *Antone!*

So it is you. It *is* you. And I sit here, and you stand there — I the living, you the dead — with the width of the room between us. But I am not frightened, not at all. I said a minute ago that I should be afraid of you if you actually came. No — no. I am not afraid, Antone. I would not hurt your feelings so much as that — now. I have hurt them too much more than that too many times, Tony dear. Oh, I know. I understand now. And the very first thing of all, I want to tell you so. I want to tell you — Don't you hear? Can't you speak? Can't you move? Just a little nearer? This is a pretty large room; I never thought how wide it was before. Who turned down

the gas? And the fire — how low it has fallen! There is moonlight — I thought I drew every curtain there is. But, yes, there is moonlight from one of the long windows, and it flows between us like a river . . . Antone? Why don't you cross it? How do you think I can talk over here — so far from you, Tony? Come! I promise not to be afraid. I feel quite brave, and calm. Antone! Can't you come to me? . . . How slowly, how solemnly he shakes his head. It is plain that he cannot speak; or else I cannot hear. Which of the two is it? I suppose God, who made ghosts, must know. Clearly, nobody else does. . . .

Then I shall go to you, Antone. See. I stand, and walk quite steadily. I will cross the river of moonlight — so — and I will come to you. I am not in the least afraid. Remember it of your firefly moth, she was not afraid of her dead husband. Some greater, better women might be. You used to call me your little devil. Remember, Antone? If I'd been a big saint I might scream, and get on my knees to say my prayers. But your little devil stands on her feet — to go to you, Antone. I won't stay over here, so far from you . . . *Antone!*

I think the river drowned me. That was it. The river of moonlight was too deep for me. I could not cross it, and that is sure. It let me

through like a trap, and tossed me back, and then it rose to the flood again, and now it runs between us, as it did before— a stream of pearl — it has that solemn look. It is like an altar, or a communion-table. It is too sacred for devils, big or little. Perhaps the other kind of woman, the sort that says prayers, might have crossed it, and got over. I can't do it. . . . It was n't the river altogether, either. Something else prevented. It felt like hands, or arms; as if I had been pushed away, or turned face about.

Antone! Was it you did that? Did you keep me off? Your great strong arms, so true, so warm, forgiving always, ready always — why, I thought they were created to hold me, Antone! I thought they would hold me forever. . . . Does dying do that kind of thing to people? . . . How disagreeable it must be to be dead. . . . Well, then. I can't help it. I'm a live woman, you see, Antone, and I must act as live people do, and *any* firefly-moth woman that I know of would get as near her dead husband as she possibly could. I won't go back to the fire. I shall stand right here, close to the moon river that has been put between us. Pearl, silver, opal, tourmaline — it is made of them all; but they are all jewels and metals, and so they had to melt to make a river. Before they were a moon river, they were solid. And so am I. I don't know whether you are

or not. I can't get near enough to find out, Antone. . . . I think if I could — if I could reach you, if I could touch you . . . but I cannot do it. . . . I cannot forget things, either; not the things I want to forget. I remember all the things I don't want to remember. They trouble me, Antone. They torment me. . . .

I am going to tell you because I've got to. I've got to do it, or else go mad myself. I don't know what I am speaking to, nor whether it will do the least good in the world — the dead world, or the live one — but speak I will, because I must. I don't know any ghost-language, only woman-language; I don't understand ghost-laws, only love-laws. Yes, and firefly-laws, and moth-laws. I don't know whether you are mist or matter, whether you are deaf or dumb, whether you are blind or whether you can see, whether you want me or don't want me — Oh, and I can't help it, I don't care. I only know you are my husband because you were my husband. Deaf or listening, blind or seeing, warm or cold, loving or not loving — Antone! Because I was your wife, because I am your wife — listen to me. . . .

I never was fit for you, Antone, from the very beginning — never. But I never knew that till now. It was the way it is with girls who have been admired a good deal, and spoiled a little — I suppose I thought I was worth any trouble on

the part of any man. I really believed it. It never occurred to me how much *you* were worth. It did not seem to me as if I had anything to do about it — about our married life. I never once thought that I should do a mortal thing to keep us happy, Antone! I left all that to you, just as I did business, and income, and newspapers, and writing books, and paying bills, and all those troublesome things. Antone, I left everything to you. I asked everything of you. I leaned on you like a heavy baby. I clutched at you like a person in the water when another person dives to save him from drowning. I believe I strangled you. Sometimes I have a dreadful thought. I wonder if I tired you out. I think perhaps I took your strength and weakened your pluck. When you had that accident, it seems to me you did n't try so hard to get well as you might. Antone! It looks to me now as if you did n't care enough. How do I know that was n't my fault? There 's a thought I have. It is a cold thought, and crawls across me, the way a snake crawls upon warm flesh. I cannot crush it nor throttle it. This is the way it looks to me: Perhaps I was so much to blame that I never even knew I was to blame. Perhaps I did you nothing but harm, and brought you nothing but evil.

Antone! I don't believe I ever understood you any more than I understood your Chinese gram-

mar. I see now — persons who are ignorant don't know they are ignorant, and people who don't understand don't understand that they don't understand. And that is what makes it so hard — yes, hard on both sides. But listen to me, Antone! See. I want you to know it. Now it does not seem to me as if there ever *were* two sides to the troubles we had. It does not look to me now as if I had any "side." It seems to me that I was almost always in the wrong. As I look back on it, you were almost always right. And that is the dreadful part of it — now. Sometimes I think it will kill me. But I know better. I know it won't do any such thing. I am young and well, and live, and my blood leaps, and my heart beats and fights in me, and I shall last — oh, I shall last till I am a very old woman. And I shall sit here evenings alone in this great room, this lonely house, and I shall cry myself sick on your empty pillow, for I loved you — oh, I did love you, Antone, whether you believed it or not, whether you forgive me or not, whether you love me or not. . . . I did. I do. But you are a dead man. You are so dead you cannot speak. How do I know you will care whether I love you or not — now? I don't know the first thing about you — now. You might as well be a star, ten million miles away. Or you might be a character from the Bible — something three or four thou-

sand years off — some strange, old, cold person that would n't notice a poor girl like me.

. . . How bright and fine the outline grows! Like drawing turning to painting, or color changing to form. Hush! I am talking too loud; or I am saying too much. His noble head lifts and leans a little, backward, and I see the shape of his chin; it is just the same as it was; he had such a high-minded chin. Now the features begin to take on their old lines and looks — his dear eyes, his lips that curved and quivered so easily, so exquisitely. I can see them move, I am sure.

. . . Antone! I can't keep still. I must speak while I have the chance. How do I know I shall ever have it again? Ghost-laws are not like woman-laws, and life, I see it plainly, is the servant or the prisoner of death.

Hark! I want to tell you two things. There are a hundred things — they pour over me, torrents of them, but there are two I must say if I do not say another word. These two rise above all the others like the foam from a cascade or a wave; they may be less solid than the wave; but they are easier to see; they dash higher — Antone! I must tell you, I will tell you how I feel now about that wretched business of Rob Acres. I was always a little fool about such things —

but I never cared two Roman pearls for him. I was born a silly thing, — half moth, half firefly, — but I never forgot that I did n't love any of them the least little bit; never, after I had seen you, Antone — never! You were so patient — too patient with me. You reasoned with me as gently as a man-angel; you should have shaken me and locked me up in a closet on educated crackers and water till I came to my senses, such as I had. I had n't many in those days. I flitted and floated about — and Rob did like me very much — and I went sizzling into that feeling he had, as if it had been a kerosene burner, a bright, hot, staring light, where you get caught between the chimney and the shade; and then, when it scorched a little, just a little, I flew to you. And *you* — oh, Antone, you made me feel so ashamed of myself, and Rob. You held it all up to me, so quietly — not ten words — as if you held up a Claude Lorrain glass to a glaring sunset that I had been looking at, and showed me that it was all set in black. Antone, I want to tell you. If I don't I shall die of the shame of remembering how it was. Antone, there never was a minute I did n't care more for one eyelash of yours than for Rob Acre's whole soul and body. I loved you —I love you, Antone, just you, nobody else. And Antone! Listen! It is true, and you've got to believe it, he never touched me, not so much as to

hold my silly hand. He never came too near me, except his eyes did — and his thoughts, I suppose. That was bad enough. But it never was any worse. And then that day I said to him: "Rob Acres, I want all this to stop. Look at that." I held up my wedding-ring, with your diamond above it, blazing. "I love my husband, Rob," I said; "I don't care for you. I don't care for any man but him. We've treated him very badly. I am going to ask his pardon, and behave myself. I am the most to blame, because I'm married and you're not," I said. "But I won't be to blame any more. Go away, Rob," I said. "I never want to see you again. Go off on a fishing trip, or something. I shall tell my husband every mortal thing I've said and done. He'll forgive me — he is made that way — but I never shall forgive myself." And I never have. And here it is, Antone — the whole story. I am telling the holy truth . . . the unholy truth, if you want to call it so. I won't deny that, either. Antone, there are times it crucifies me. . . .

Now, quick! Listen, while you can. The other one is that day when you were sick, and I went to the Frasers' and left you. Out of half a thousand matters that happened in our married life, why that one? Just that one to come back, and persist, and corrode the same spot in me, like a spatter of vitriol. No, it has never healed over. It's

just the way you looked, that's all. I see it; I see it, till I think I'd rather go blind way back in the optic nerve if I need n't ever see it again. But that would n't make any difference, would it? See just the same, would n't you? You'll know. I don't. You used to know everything. I don't have anybody to ask about things now.

It was the look about your mouth I minded most, more than your eyes; and you did n't speak. You turned your face away upon the pillow. You were so hurt you could n't say a word. And I went and left you — so. I went and danced and fooled till midnight. When I came back you were worse — feverish, and coughing hard. I said some silly thing, I remember — making light of what ailed you, the way well people do. That was one of the troubles with me. I was too well — did not understand. I never knew what it was not to be comfortable. I was not sensitive. You were. I had n't nerves enough. You had too many — all that studying and writing. I treated you as if you had been a rough person. I never discounted anything for what you were or what you did. I never understood you — never. Now that it is too late, I am beginning to. And that is the cruel part of it.

. . . Antone! Don't *go!* Not *yet!* Oh, stay! Wait a little. Listen to me. I have n't finished. I must say something more. Antone!

. . . He shakes his head so determinedly, so silently, that it frightens me. Is it that he cannot stay? Or that he will not? Antone! . . .

See the gray breath between us. Now it is a cloud — purple — almost black — it mounts, and darkens. He yields to it, and it takes him. He melts, and is not. The river of moonlight has dwindled to a sickly brook. The great room is so still that I could shriek into it. The curtains stir, the screen thrills . . . as if it had absorbed him. Perhaps he has not gone beyond it. Who knows? I have never been a spirit; how can I tell what spirits are capable of? Who knows what things contain them? Or thoughts? Perhaps thoughts contain them. It might be . . . Antone! Don't stay hiding over there. Come to me. Come into my thoughts, Antone. They can't hold anything but you. Oh, come into my heart! It aches for you, as if it had been gashed and emptied. I am *all you*, Antone. Come back to me, I say. If you were alive, and I were dead, I'd go to *you*. Heaven nor earth nor hell shouldn't prevent me . . . not if you wanted me. Antone!

. . . I believe it is coming back, after all . . . but so new, so different from the other. This is not so real as the other. It is like a photograph. I see it quite distinctly — small, like a figure on a negative. Am I the camera? Has my heart photographed him? Or my will? He stands as

he stood in that picture of his I like best — in his rough, tweed suit; just his everyday look, his dear look. He regards me straight and steadily. As I watch, the picture slowly grows; as if the photographer were enlarging it . . . the noble head, the strong attitude, the whole man of him.

There, Antone! I knew you would come back to me. I meant you should. I did n't believe you could refuse me — now. It does n't seem much for a live wife to ask of a dead husband — just to stay long enough to hear her through. So! Listen again, Antone. . . .

It's just as I told you, I was too well. I had always been too comfortable. I was dulled by health and happiness, and having my own way. And when I first began to know what discomfort was, and what it meant not to do things, and what it was like to bear anything unpleasant — I think I must have been a perfect little devil. I wonder you put up with me at all, Antone. I can't see how you bore with it, or why you were so patient . . . never scolded once; never a cross word, not one in all that time. . . .

Now this is what I'm coming to. Of all the hatefulness I ever did by you, the hatefulest was the way I acted about the baby. Why in the world girls marry, and then are so surprised, and act so wronged, and are so wretched — I can't

see. But they do. And I did. And I went through all that stage; I went through it like an imp. I was fairly vicious. I believe I was malignant. I fretted and fumed and fussed. I complained and blamed — oh, I believe I blamed you. I was capable of it. And I did everything I could, short of murdering. You never knew the half of it, Antone. I never quite went so far as to be willing to kill it; but I wanted it to die. Oh, yes, I wanted the baby to die. I'll own to that . . . the poor little miserable, helpless thing . . . my baby . . . our baby. I never wanted it, and when I found it was going to be, I hoped it never would be at all. I did, I did! I confess to you, Antone. Listen to me.

Confess again! Confess again! When it really happened, when the poor little fellow did die, then I wanted him to live. While I lay there, weak and wretched, broken and brought to myself, I longed for him to live. If I'd known how to pray, I should have prayed for the baby to go on living. But he could n't — how could he? After all there was of me had set against him for so many months — like something smothering fire — the poor little spark went out. It had to. It never had the chance to be a living flame. And when I saw the way you looked — and trying not to let me know how you felt, for fear it should trouble me or hurt me — Antone! Tony — *dear*

Tony! Oh, forgive me, can't you? Won't you try?

You are a great white ghost, and I am so small and so miserable — nobody but you in this world or any other. Antone, I say, you *shall* forgive me! I will come — I don't care if I die for it, too — I will come into your arms, and take the consequences. I don't care how dead you are, nor I don't care what happens to me. Where should a live wife go if not to her husband's heart? Dear ghost! Dear Tony! Take me — see — take me this very minute. Hold out your arms — so — Now keep me, Antone. . . .

There, I knew you would. Hold fast, darling. Don't let any of your cold, old angels pull me away. I don't belong to angels — no, nor devils, either. I belong to you. Keep hold of me, I say.

What? I don't understand. Antone? *Not dead?* Live, and warm and strong — the same as ever — just you, dear, after all? . . . I can't seem to sit up. Don't let me go. I feel pretty weak and strange. Slip your arm under my shoulder — so — and never let me go again. Did n't die? Are you sure you did n't die, after all? . . . Are you sure you did n't die, at all? . . . You live, strong, warm, real man, you! . . . Oh, hush! Tony, Tony, *Tony!* . . .

Was I so sick as all that? Oh, I see. And that accounts for it. I must have been. . . . Yes, I see. It blunted the pain of my body and sharpened the pain of my mind. And it took that form, Tony — just you, you . . . nobody else . . . But such a little time? And eternities happened. . . . That little dead baby — I don't think I want to see him. I might feel badly, after all.

How curious this is! Don't let me slip away again. I must n't see those sights I saw any more. . . . What is that over there on the other side of this big bed? It lies so still. I am afraid of it. I'm too weak to look at any more ghosts. And this would be such a tiny one — it would make your heart sick to look at it.

Why, it moves, Antone! It is warm. It is warm to my fingers, now they touch it. It is a living thing. It never died. Nobody died at all. Why, you poor little, blessed, breathing baby! Lift it up, Antone, and put it in my arms.

THE ROMANCE OF THE BILL

The divine right of states to make the citizen as miserable as possible was adequately illustrated in the construction of Committee Room No. 246. A small room, offering an area of not more than twenty-five feet by twenty, and usually filled to its seating capacity, No. 246 gasped for the breath of life. A committee room without windows presented itself to the minds of the petitioners as one of those problems in statecraft whose solution is deferred to another and wiser world. But the Committee on Agriculture and Anarchy took it as a matter of course. It will never be known, by the way, till the sea of public life gives up its dead, why the fate of a bill dedicated to the domestic relations should have been assigned to a Committee on Agriculture and Anarchy. Upon this political mystery we may decline to encroach.

A parsimonious skylight capped the lead-colored walls of the committee room; this compromise with extremity was ajar, and the faces of the audience, instinctively uplifted to it, bore an assorted set of expressions presenting the earlier stages of asphyxiation in their conscious

or unconscious forms. One of the petitioners, who wore a white chiffon veil, was remarked for this fact; although she sat far back in the rear of the room, as near the open door as possible, and waved a little black pocket-fan with nervous vigor, she did not remove her veil. Her neighbors on either side of her had long ago folded theirs up and back on the brims of their hats. The sarcastic member of the committee (he was Senate chairman) reflected that if lovely woman knew how she looked that way, she would forego the practice. It was March, when lovely woman takes to veils, for some inscrutable reason unfathomed by the masculine mind. It was a feminine bill, and the ever-womanly predominated at the hearing.

The committee, viewing the bill in the light of this circumstance, presented that variety in unity of obstruction which is characteristic of committees in contact with the struggling and unpopular minority. Across their wearied faces indifference, indulgence, and *ennui* moved mechanically like the colors under a symmetroscope; these settled into the fixed form of a general sense of sex superiority. Of this the most inferior men carried the largest share.

The Senate chairman was not altogether an inferior man, and this masculine expression, which is received among women either by exas-

peration or by scorn, according to the nature of the woman, was less marked upon his countenance than might have been expected of his bearing — in itself imperious and irritable. The nervous attitudes, the overbearing voice, the scalding retorts with which his committee were familiar (he worked them like a slave-driver), gave one a curious impression when one turned from the manner to the man. Plainly, life had subdued his features, while leaving the remainder of him rebel. He had a hopeless mouth, and there was not, outside of the world of woe, a sadder eye. The young counsel for the remonstrants exercised himself upon the chairman's manner. But the elderly counsel for the petitioners addressed himself to the chairman's face.

The bill was a novelty in Room 246; it was irreverently known in the lobby as the Soothing Syrup Bill. Even its title — An Act Relative to the Rights of Mothers — was a departure from the conventional phraseology, and, therefore, the subject of some active pyrotechnics between counsel.

The chairman (himself a lawyer) endured these legal amusements with the indifference of his kind; in fact, he sat with his chair tipped back against the leaden wall, and his eyes closed heavily.

"Sleeps like 'Now I lay me,'" whispered the bold member.

"I stump you to say that aloud," replied the timid member.

In truth, this chairman's committee were afraid of him, and had for him the kind of admiration which fear creates, and it was generally supposed that he would carry them as one man against the bill; to oppose which it was understood that he was, in fact, practically prepossessed. In State-House phrase it was a "fixed" bill. The committee passed solemnly through the farce of the hearings attendant upon its consideration. They knew, and the remonstrants knew, and the petitioners knew, and everybody knew that the bill would not be reported. It was a phase of one of those moral struggles whose evolution progresses through pugnacity and audacity, equalled only by a patience called unimaginative by foes and splendid by friends.

Now the chairman, despite the circumstantial evidence to the contrary, was not asleep. He looked lazily through his black lashes. The committee were whispering comfortably. The House chairman was reading a newspaper. There was a spider on the skylight, spinning a web. It came slowly down, swinging on a single silver-gray halyard that a breath would break, aiming straight for the bald head of the counsel for the petitioners, or — no — was it rather directed to the lady petitioner with the Derby hat who was

reading a paper fifty minutes long for the discouragement of her cause? There was a red quill on her hat. There are few animals, though clearly less intelligent than spiders, who do not "see scarlet." The chairman devoutly hoped that the spider would fasten its halyard to that quill. He hated women with Derby hats. She was an unmarried woman, and elderly; her views upon the legal status of mothers might nevertheless have been valuable, but the chairman's handsome face assumed the sardonic cast of a man who takes the traditional view of things.

The figures of his committee blurred a little before him. The petitioner with the quill harangued fast and faster, lest she talk overtime. The spider on its silver snare descended subtly. The spider seemed to reflect, and to weigh the evidence. But the chairman had ceased to watch that aerial advocate. In the brows of the bill relative to the rights of mothers, this representative of the Legislature of his commonwealth was, in truth, at last comfortably asleep. His committee had considered sixty other bills that term; the remonstrants pardoned him.

"Mr. Chairman —"

A voice of singularly penetrating quality, considering how low it was, pronounced these two finely modulated words.

The chairman sprang into consciousness as a

new-born or a reborn soul may leap out of the dark.

"Mr. Chairman" — the speaker paused for a poignant moment — "and gentlemen of the committee," she added, not without the effect of an afterthought.

"Good Lord!" thought the chairman, "what have I done? This one 's talking to *me*."

Alert to the last nerve of him, the aroused and astounded legislator braced himself to meet the sensation. That there *was* a sensation was evident enough. Every man in the committee was listening. The timid member had assumed a positive expression. The bold member looked subdued. The House chairman had put down his newspaper. The opposing lawyers exchanged covert and amiable glances. The audience leaned forward to the backs of the next settees. The remonstrants whispered together haughtily. But the petitioners held their breath. She of the Derby, to do her justice, generous to the quality of her successor, sat enthralled. The spider, vibrating with delicate, swaying motions above the red quill, seemed itself to listen to the human argument, as if it recognized something not unfamiliar in the general train of thought.

Shall I? Shall I not? Make the web? Break the web? Advance? Retreat?

Thus, or in some curious measure not unlike

this, the delicate, swaying figure of the petitioner for the rights of mothers seemed to express a beautiful consciousness timid to distress, at civil war with itself, the emotion of a woman dragged where she stood, against her nature; yet proudly able, "having done all, to stand." It was left to her attitudes and voice to interpret her. Of her face the committee could see little enough — too little, they would have said, to a man. It seemed to be a gentle face, and young; fair, perhaps; but it was shielded by a soft, white chiffon veil. The bass petitioner had entreated her to remove this; but the lady had not done so. The Senator — his name, it seems, was Thomas Handel — the Senator stirred uneasily; his chair came down on its four feet, but softly.

"I'll own to it," he whispered to the timid member. "I was blanked tired. I did n't catch the name of the witness."

"Morrison," replied the bold member, "a Mrs. Morrison."

"There!" protested the timid member, "she's stopped. She won't talk to a whispering committee."

"The deuce she won't!" growled the chairman. "She'll have to strike some other commonwealth than this, then."

But he said no more. The color smote his cheeks at the lady's rebuke. The gentleman in

him accepted it, while the legislator sneered. It occurred to him to hit back, by requesting the petitioner to lift her veil. But he could not think of any authorizing statute. Shielded, clouded, rendered evasive, and gently eluding the imperious eyes and now clamoring mental confusion of Thomas Handel, the petitioner, behind her mask of silvery chiffon, spoke straight on. She spoke with a simplicity which would have won the respect of an orator, and with a feminine quality which commanded every man in the room. She had the evident advantage of knowing what she wished to say. She was equipped. Her material outran her expression; her sentences were packed; her thought was so clear to herself, that her audience inhaled its clarity without knowing that, or why, they did so. The lady spoke quite without rhetorical effort, and with what an experienced ear would have detected as the signs of inexperience. She of the Derby was far better trained. Mrs. Morrison was, plainly, not a platform woman. Yet, nevertheless, or perhaps — who shall say? — therefore, plainly she agreed with the committee. Surfeited with talk, rendered sardonic by three sessions a day, and incredulous of anything left worth listening to in the confines of the commonwealth — the Committee on Agriculture and Anarchy went suddenly and solidly captive to the petitioner behind the chiffon veil.

The room was now still. The colored messenger had dropped into a chair and was listening with the rest. Perceiving the spider swaying, he made a grab at it, missed it, overturned his chair, and retired in confusion. But the lady spoke on, quite undisturbed. The chairman brushed his hand across his eyes once or twice, as if he would brush away the sight of her; pressed his hands to his ears automatically, as if he would deny to them the sound of her; then sat staring; while he stared, he heard.

The petitioner had somewhat outspoken her first embarrassment, and her low voice pulsated through the room with the vibration of self-forgotten power. Very much a woman, — all a woman, it seemed, — she spoke as women without the modern training do, if they speak at all; not the less, necessarily, by argument, but the more by illustration.

The petitioner was concrete. She pleaded for the individual woman. She offered personal cases. She related the histories of divided homes into which existing laws had come, less wise than the sword of Solomon, denying to her who bore the child the right to rear it. Her voice, which did not rise, deepened; now it assumed an authoritative and sacred tone, and the heart-break of motherhood was in it; then it grew unexpectedly immature and helpless, like the wail of a

child. The soul of the ever-womanly was hers, and it spoke — as it has done and will do, yesterday, to-day, and forever — the tongue which no man knoweth.

The committee did not understand what was happening. They said to themselves: "This is not like other hearings. It is impossible to sleep. One cannot read the morning paper. One does not converse. It would be agreeable if the petitioner would remove her veil. Ah! That was too bad. If such cases were common — No. He should have left her the child. It was n't fair." Thus reasoned the committee. They did not know what was happening, but they went down before the event. The petitioner was winning their heads through their hearts, and storming their prejudices through their chivalry.

The witness stood wavering, and trembled. She sank into a chair that the counsel for the petition presented. She thought, "I am going to disgrace the bill, and faint." But she did not faint. Now that it was over, she knew how frightened she had been.

No — it was not all. But there would be time enough for that. She felt for her little black pocket-fan. The elderly counsel fanned her with a fatherly manner.

The committee roused from a condition now plainly felt to be unparliamentary, and collected

themselves for the usual inquisition of the witness. This gave occasion for the professional display of a legal committee.

"I should like to ask the lady," began the bold member, "as regards one of the cases that she put in evidence —"

But the chairman frowned.

"Leave the witness alone," he said imperiously. "Can't you see she is tired out? She shall not be cross-examined."

The chairman's face was fixed; it had taken on pallid streaks about the mouth.

"There is not air enough here for a man in his coffin!" he cried crossly. "Open everything!"

The doors and the skylight of Room 246 were flung wide. The audience gasped, and broke, and scattered. The petitioners gathered and purred about the last witness, and she of the Derby would have torn off the chiffon veil. But Mrs. Morrison shook her head.

"I am perfectly well," she was heard to say distinctly.

The chairman sat still. Once he rose and made a step or two forward. But the witness was guarded by women; buzzing about her, they bore her away.

It was growing dark in Room 246. The lead-colored walls reached out long arms for shadows.

Audience, committee, counsel, witnesses had melted out of the dusky place. There was air and to breathe, now; as there is solitude and to spare in the spaces of an empty life. Only the chairman, the colored messenger, and the spider remained in the room. The spider seemed disconcerted, like one who has lost the thread of the argument; it wavered to and fro in some embarrassment, swinging on its silver snare, as a being that reflected and reasoned with itself:

"*Advance? Retreat? Make the web? Break the web? Mend? Rend?*"

The chairman sat quite still. He had put on his hat. His chin rested on his shut hands. He neither saw nor heard the messenger, who clattered impatiently.

One does not interfere with the whims of Senators in the State House, and the messenger, who knew his place, liked it none the better for that. Now, sharply changing his position, the chairman dashed pen to paper, and began to write: "Dear George —"

The door swung in softly. A lady entered — drew back — hesitated — then resolutely advanced.

"Is the messenger still here?" she asked, in a low, distressed voice. "I have left — I have lost my purse."

The chairman sprang to his feet.

"Go, Peter," he commanded, "and find it for her."

"Madam," he added, "if you will allow me — perhaps I can help Peter."

He strode across the darkening room. The spider, delicately swaying, dipped, and dropped, and fastened his silver cable to the politician's soft felt hat. The gentleman removed the hat before the lady, and the wisest of insects, in a panic, fled.

They found the purse under the settee, and the chairman restored it to the petitioner's hands; these trembled as she took it.

"Put it in your pocket," he said, in his autocratic way — the way that women liked and men resented.

"I have n't any," faltered the petitioner. "It is a foolish fashion —"

"You deserved to lose it," abruptly, from the Senator.

"If I could afford to lose it," said Mrs. Morrison, in a stronger voice, "I should not have come back to the committee room —"

Now, panting, she turned and fled from him, and the doors of Room No. 246 shut behind her.

"The elevator ain't runnin'; they 're off for the night," observed Peter, shutting the skylight hard. "The lady 'll have all them stairs. —

Swing low, sweet chariot!" added Peter. "Got him out of this dummed room this time!"

As Peter locked the committee room for the night, the chairman strode down the lobby. He found her standing patiently by the elevator landing.

"You 'll wait till morning, if you wait for that machine," he observed carelessly, "and you will lose your way. You are not accustomed to the State House. Allow me to pilot you, madam."

She made as if she would have refused; but did not speak.

"It 's between me and Peter," he urged. "You are faint. You cannot get down four flights alone. You are liable to fall. That would be awkward, and might create a scene."

"Then call Peter," pleaded the petitioner, faintly. Dismissed beyond appeal, the chairman lifted his hat, and summoned the messenger.

The petitioner came out weakly into the air and into the street. Gasping, she tore off her veil. Groping, she put out her hand in its well-worn, neatly mended glove, and stayed herself by the iron fence. The electric arc made a swirl of white light, into which she seemed to be swept, dashing.

"I did not have luncheon enough," she thought; as if she often did have luncheon enough. She

had now reached a point of mental and physical exhaustion where she began to understand that anything might happen. She remembered reading of respectable women who had fainted and been carried to the lock-up as drunken persons. She thought: —

"I look so poor. My dress is so old. I should not be taken for a lady."

She leaned against the iron fence.

Now long, imperious steps rang up the sidewalk and stopped abruptly at her side. As she swayed, an iron arm closed about her. A voice which she had loved with the love that is submerged in hate, and hated with the hate that is born of love uttered four words: —

"God in heaven! *Mary!*"

With her weak hands thrust out and instinctive, she pushed him from her. Her face was no grayer than his who leaned over her.

"Let me go!" she demanded, with a savage, unfeminine cry. "I did not know it was you — till I got there. I could n't help it, then. I — had to go — on. I had promised those women. And my veil is — pretty thick."

She held up the bit of silver chiffon, piteously clutched in her shaking hand.

"You know perfectly well I never faint! And I prefer not to get into that carriage — with you."

The cold drops started on the politician's fore-

head. He found himself adopting a tone that he used to find effectual with her.

"I shan't impose myself. Do me what justice you can. The cab shall carry you wherever you wish to go. It shall take you home."

His sentence stumbled over the word, and fell. His blazing eyes took in the details of her shabby black dress — she looked poor, and cold, and half-fed — *Mary*. She had never taken a dollar from him since they separated — these five years. She was the proudest woman for a sweet one, and the sweetest woman for a proud one, that he had ever known.

"I will walk," said Thomas Handel's wife.

"You will ride," said Thomas Handel.

He lifted her into the cab, and got in beside her. As he shut the door her eyes closed heavily. She gave a little sigh, and fell over against the side of the carriage — even then he noticed that she fell as far from him as possible.

Now the Senator found himself in a precious quandary. He felt that politics presented no problems like this. It would be easier to be elected lieutenant-governor than to decide what course of conduct to pursue at this incredible and unexampled moment. If he took her to her lodgings — But she had not mentioned where her lodgings were. If he sent her to the hospital — Mary should not go to the hospital. If he took her —

It cannot be said that he did not, for the width of a prudent moment, consider the consequences. These might be various, and some of them must be inevitable. And he had meant to run for Congress next fall. He looked at her unconscious face. He had changed her position, impetuously, and now, like a woman who loved him, she lay broken in his arms. He had torn off her old, mended glove, to get her pulse; he had torn open her dress, and her heart beat beneath his hand. Yet he knew that the Sphinx of Egypt was not farther from him.

The driver stood deferential and staring.

"Home," said the Senator, shortly.

The doctor came out of the room, and the two men measured each other before either spoke.

"This is going to be a matter of weeks," began the physician, slowly. "When she comes out of these faints, she will pass into something worse. There 's fever enough for almost any result. The patient is worn out — and underfed. Shall I send for the ambulance?"

"The patient does not go to the hospital."

"A nurse, then?"

"Any number of them. Do anything. Take care of her, that 's all. My housekeeper will do as she is told. She 's trained to that."

"I think you said the lady was a family friend?" interrupted the doctor.

"A friend of my wife's," said Thomas Handel. "I can't have her neglected."

"Look here, Handel," observed the physician, unexpectedly, "you might as well trust me. A good many people do — and some have to. This patient won't be easy to manage when she comes to her senses. She 's capable of running off in her wrapper and slippers. I 've known 'em to. I might be of some use if I had the facts. Otherwise, you see, I can't."

"The patient," repeated the politician, with a glittering smile, "was a friend of my wife's."

"As you please," replied the doctor, stiffly. "Of course you know that passing for a widower — and with your political prospects —"

"Blank my political prospects!" cried the Senator.

"As you please," repeated the physician, coldly. He went downstairs, and slowly opened the door.

Thomas Handel followed him thoughtfully. On the stone steps he paused, and calling, "Oh, see here, Doctor!" vaulted over the wheel into the doctor's buggy. Then the two men conferred in sharp sentences, as men do, wasting neither words, time, nor emotion. The physician received the politician's confidence without

comment. It was to him only one of life's acute disorders — running rather longer than usual — nothing more.

"I 'll do what I can," he said shortly. "Meanwhile keep out of the way. I shall lose the case if you don't."

It was four weeks from that day, on a vivid April morning, that the doctor came downstairs and incidentally said, "If you 'll come home early this afternoon, you shall see her."

"Has she asked for me?"

"No."

"Does she wish to see me?"

"No."

"Has she forgiven me?"

"Not yet."

"God, Doctor! She used to be the gentlest woman — Are they all like that?"

"There 's the usual variation of species. This one 's all mother."

"She used to be all wife!"

"So it struck me," dryly from the doctor.

"You consider the situation irrevocable?"

"Nothing is irrevocable but death. Dead love is the deadest thing there is."

The physician took up his hat. He said something about the wheel which did not turn with the water that had passed.

"But that 's a masculine maxim," said Handel, with smiling, white lips. "I never heard it used in the feminine brief. I always thought it was the property of our sex. See here, Doctor. Do me justice — if she can't. I honestly believed it was best for the boy to go to that boarding-school — and to stay there. I never meant to be — I thought I was doing the proper thing. And we were n't used to that Alabama climate. She was a Philadelphia girl before we took that plantation on one of my blanked experiments. I tried experiments in those days — before I came back to my own State and settled down and went to work. How should I know that d——d parson's house was in the black belt? I thought it was a case where the man's judgment —"

"Lord, yes!" groaned the doctor. "We all think so. That 's the devil of it. Unfortunately these congestive chills make short work of it, sometimes. If the boy had lived —"

The man's head sunk upon his breast. "Have you interceded for me?" he asked brokenly.

The physician's eye widened and darkened solemnly.

"Don't count on that," he said, not ungently. "There is no hurt like the hurt of a tender woman. There are n't a great many of them left. They don't heal by the first intention. Frankly, Handel, I would n't stake a box of Havanas, either

way, on your chances. You may as well have the truth straight out."

The politician stood on the sidewalk in the bright, hot sun. He had caught up a hat that he had not worn since that hearing on the bill relative to the rights of mothers — his old soft black felt. But, for some reason, he had not put it on. Now, glancing down, he observed a dusty speck upon the crown, and so noticed that it was a bit of the silver snare of a spider's web. Broken threads of that fancy which had pleased him in the committee room swung through his brain: —

Shall we? Shall we not? Break the web? Make the web?

That afternoon, when he came in, she was lying on the lounge, folded in something blue, which he recognized, not altogether with pleasure, as the property of his housekeeper. The housekeeper had made herself *persona non grata* lately. She had got into the way of speaking of their guest as a friend of the first Mrs. Handel's.

A blue blanket, thrown over the convalescent, was tossed down to her feet. As he knocked at the open door of his guest-room she instinctively drew the blanket up, as if he had been a stranger. There were flowers on the table beside her — mignonette (Mary used to like mignonette); he had sent it up every day. The nurse was not in

the room, but the sun was, and a wholesome breath of free, west wind. She turned, and their eyes met in poignant silence. The years of their married life stepped in between them like dual forces contending with each other, and with them. It was as if half their memories drew them together, while half held them apart. Scenes that he thought he had forgotten forever, rose like a freshet upon his consciousness. Incidents that she had forced out of her mind for years, relentlessly crowded back to it. She felt as she supposed people felt who would go mad if they did not know how to steady themselves. She pressed her hands to her head, and her color went from cloud-white to rose-crimson. She was the first to speak, and she began at once, hurrying and tripping over her words, her sentences thrust out like iron forks:—

"I shall be able to go day after to-morrow. . . . I have made you a great deal of trouble. . . . You should have let me go to the hospital. . . . I hope you understand I never meant . . . I *never* expected to cross your path. I thought it was such a large city. . . . I never was in it before. We lived in such quiet places, you and I. I was very green. . . . I had the chance to do the Woman's Column on a daily. That woman with the Derby hat got it for me. She is a kind woman, and very clever. She is to be respected.

. . . I had to live; I 've been writing ever since we — ever since I — After I got here, I was sick, and I lost the position on the 'Morning Journal.' Then they found me some lecturing. I was getting along. I promised them I 'd go to the State House. I could n't back out of it; you must see that. . . . I did n't feel sure that you would know me. I thought perhaps you would n't. It had been a good while —"

She stopped, panting; he had sat down beside her and listened without interruption — gently, she noticed; he had not always been gentle with her. There were tears in his eyes, but neither hope nor comfort looked through that misty lens. He looked as he felt — at the world's width from her.

"You did not think about the name," she said. "It was my mother's before she was married. I felt sure you would n't remember. You never did remember such things."

"No," he admitted, "I did n't; I never thought of it. . . . It was the voice."

His own shook now; the athletic man envied the composure of the sick woman; he got to his feet, and his long, strong figure strode to and fro across the shaft of sun, between the window and the mignonette. She smiled faintly.

"You still do it, don't you?" she suggested. "How many miles I 've seen you walk, that way!"

"We always had such darned little rooms!" he ventured, stopping short. "You used to say —"

"Never mind what I used to say," she interrupted sharply. "I — I don't want to hear it. I have enough — without that. I 'm not very strong yet. I 've *got* to get well."

"You 've got to be taken care of," he replied. He stood with his hands in his pockets looking down at her; her averted profile was cut delicately and obstinately against the blue pillow of the lounge. Everything in the room was blue; she had noticed that. She perceived that he had carried over her taste and feeling about colors into his solitary house. Tom did n't know one color from another before they were married.

"I am going day after to-morrow," she suddenly observed. "I thank you for — your hospitality."

"Great Scott, Mary!" said Thomas Handel. He dashed away the chair, and knelt by the side of the lounge. "You shall never go!" he cried. His arms went round her fiercely. All his natural imperiousness was uppermost. A man may make his wife most miserable, and retain the conviction that he has always loved her; and Thomas Handel was one of these men.

But Mary shrank against the back of the lounge.

"I am your guest," she said coldly.

He got to his feet with something of his old impatience.

"You are the only woman in the world I 'd kneel to!"

"And you are the only man who would say so in that tone!"

Now, for the second time, she smiled a little; she could not help it. But he regarded her desolately.

"It seems to me, Mary," he said, "that we 've had about enough of this. No matter how wrong I was, I 've been pretty thoroughly punished. It may be the nature of a man to be in the wrong — those women up there at the State House seemed to think so —"

"But you thought it was in the nature of woman to forgive him?"

"Perhaps I did," said Thomas Handel, gently.

At this she changed color, and it was not without a certain embarrassment that she answered.

"Look here, Tom. Don't lose your head. The scandal would cost you your political prospects."

"Blank my political prospects!"

"Remain a comfortable widower, and run for Congress — as you intended. Introduce an unapparent wife, and you 'll never get over it in the world. Nothing ruins a man quicker in this State than matrimonial troubles. I have n't been here long, but I 've found that out."

"Blank Congress!" cried the politician. With an impetuous motion of his long arm he knocked over the vase of mignonette, and the water rippled upon the table and began to drip over.

Now she laughed outright.

"Sop it up, Tom, sop it up with something! You 'll spoil the carpet. You always did. I never knew you fail to tip over every single vase that ventured into the same room with you. There! It 's a pretty carpet. It would be a pity."

She handed him her handkerchief; he mopped up the water gloomily.

"It 's all very well to talk," he began, "but you and I have got to act."

"No," she said, freezing over at once. "It is only I who have to act. I shall do so to-morrow."

"You said day after to-morrow."

"I have changed my mind," said Mary, composedly. "I am going to-morrow."

"For instance — where?"

"For instance, why should you ask?"

Both were now quite pale. She had struggled up from the sofa-pillows, and was sitting erect and firm upon the lounge. He was storming across the room, hands in his pockets, anger on his lips, and love in his eyes. So she had seen him — ah, how many times! With something like a shock

she perceived of herself that whereas the hot temper of the man disturbed her less than it used to do, the consciousness that he loved her impressed her more.

"I 'll not kneel to you again," he said manfully. "I ask you to come back to me, that 's all. God knows I have never had a happy hour since we parted. I 've been miserable enough to suit you, Mary."

"How many did we have before?" she interrupted, cruelly.

"Why, I thought we had a good many," replied Thomas Handel.

At this she suddenly cried out, stretching both her hands into the air; but when he touched her she flung him off, and then she sat rocking to and fro, and racked, sobbing as women do who have not wept for years. Then he forgot what he had said, and humbled himself, and dropped to his knees again before her.

"Mary — for God's sake! You 're not the only one of us that loved the boy. . . . If you 've suffered — all this while — what do you think I 've done? . . . *Mary!*"

But she thrust him off, still crying piteously; her moans were like those of some vivisected creature, fastened to a rack and carved.

"I 'm not coming back to you. You need n't ask it. How do I know you are not just the

same? There are n't any illusions left to married people. Marriage is such a fearful thing. Nobody would ever risk it without ideals and honeymoons and all that pretty nonsense. We should have to begin all over again without any of it. We should be always wise; we should always remember; we should remember too much."

"I believe you love me," he said hoarsely, "in spite of all."

"I have hated you a good deal!" she shot out.

As her composure left her, his returned; and now, seeing her as she was, he felt a sudden mighty pity for her, and all the manhood in him arose to spare her.

"I don't blame you for that, Mary," he said quietly. "But still, I thought, if you had happened to love me, after all . . . even if it were n't so very much —"

"I wish I did n't!" wailed Mary Handel. "Oh, I wish, I wish I did n't!"

But when he sprang towards her she made of both her shaking hands a shield. If it had been shining steel he could more easily have smitten it or passed it.

"Then," he groaned, "you are more hard than God Almighty. It is because of the child."

"It is because of the child," she said.

The chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Anarchy sat in Room 246 morning and afternoon. There was a bill to reduce the day's labor of plumbers and carpenters to five hours. It was a popular bill, and all the petitioners were men.

The timid member and the bold member gave devout attention to the witnesses, and the House chairman read no newspapers. Peter, the messenger, listened to the arguments. He thought: "Five hours an' five dollars a day. Swing low, sweet chariot! If this bill goes I'll quit politics, you bet, and be a dummed plumber."

The bill relative to the rights of mothers had been reported on two weeks ago. The chairman had swung his committee over with him unanimously in its favor. The petitioner with the Derby hat went every day to the Legislature, occupying herself with the fixed idea that the bill would pass.

Fumbling among his papers that morning, the Senator had come across an unfinished note begun in his own hand weeks ago, on the day that the petitioner with the chiffon veil pleaded for the rights of mothers. The note was addressed to an intimate political friend, and ran thus:

"Dear George, — I am afraid there 's something in this Soothing Syrup Bill, after all. I will

be frank with you, and say that I shall probably vote for it. As to running for the Third District —"

Thomas Handel read the note, dashed his pen upon it, and finished with a mighty blot.

"— Blank the Third District!

"Yours truly,

"T. HANDEL."

When he came to his own house on that gentle April evening, his housekeeper met him with an ungentle smile.

She said that friend of the first Mrs. Handel's had left. She took the four thirty-five electric. She made no bones of goin' without any messages, and the housekeeper felt called upon to say that of all ungrateful —

"That will do," said the Senator. He took off his hat and coat and walked unsteadily upstairs. The door of the guest-room was open, and the blue blanket folded on the foot of the lounge. There was still a muddy spot on the carpet where he had tipped over the vase. The mignonette was dying in the vase. He picked up one of the withered stalks and hid it in his vest-pocket. Then he went to the lounge and caught the blue blanket to his lips — burying his face in it. As

he did this something dropped from the blanket and rustled to the floor. It was a laundry bill — a poor little scanty bill — and it contained Mrs. Morrison's address.

He did not go that day, nor the next; in fact, he waited a week. He knew Mary.

There came a rainy afternoon when he waited no longer, but cut the Committee on Agriculture and Anarchy, and rode splashing through the dreary streets to her shabby lodgings. It was one of those sofa-bed places which have no reception room, and where visitors are reduced to obscurity in dingy hallways ornamented by the weekly wash. The Senator thumped upstairs fiercely. The petitioner with the Derby hat met him on the stairs. A maid of much work, in crimping-pins, flung open the door of a third-story back room, — with a sofa-bed, — shot him without remark into the room, and shut the door behind him.

Mary was on the sofa, covered with an old blanket shawl — he remembered the shawl; it had a blue and gray plaid. She was working, or she was trying to. Every writer knows the fatal difference. She put down her pen without undignified haste; and only her evident effort not to exhibit emotion betrayed the fact that she had any.

"I beg your pardon," began Handel, at once.

"I was unprepared for the methods of announcing guests in this shebang. I thought I 'd run in and see if you were comfortable. No objection to that, is there, Mary?"

"N-no," replied Mary, thoughtfully, "I don't know that there is. Will you have a chair? There is one that is n't broken, I believe. Take those proof-sheets off, and the newspapers — oh, and the hot-water bag. I find this climate so — cold —" she faltered away.

With set lips he gave the whole lot a shove, and pushed the chair up, not quietly, at a ceremonious distance from the sofa-bed. He sat down hard and looked around the room with elevated eyebrows.

"Comfortable?" he asked.

"Oh, very," said Mary, earnestly.

The door blew open at this moment.

"It won't stay shut on windy days," apologized Mary. "I have to lock it."

"That suits me," observed Thomas Handel. He strode over and turned the key.

"Mr. Handel," said Mary, haughtily, "I am not accustomed to receive gentlemen callers with my door locked. I have my reputation to consider."

"Ye-es?" drawled Handel, "so I thought. I am here with a view to that end."

"You will unlock the door, sir," commanded Mary. He sat quite still.

"Unlock the door, Tom — please," pleaded Mary.

He got up and unlocked it. Before he had crossed the room again the door blew back.

"You see," he said, stopping short.

"Very well," conceded Mary, reluctantly.

He went back and locked the door.

When he returned she saw that the whole aspect and manner of the man had changed; and in them both the woman perceived that with which no woman parleys. He did not sit down, but stood compelling her; out of his unhoping eyes the ever-masculine looked forth, thwarted but dominant; his sad mouth trembled; his tenderness and his instinct of supremacy contended with each other. In such moments ruder men have crushed or killed the woman who defied them. For a moment Mary felt nothing less than acute fear. She had been afraid of him sometimes, years ago. What was that in his eyes? A blow? Or a caress that was worse than the other?

"I would rather he struck me than kissed me," she thought. For her heart arose and deserted her, and sided with the man. And she knew that her foe was not his anger, nor his love, but her own unmurdered need of him.

He did not hurt her. And he did not kiss her. He stooped and took her cold hands, one, and

then the other, and warmed them in his own. He used to do this when she was chilled or tired. He used to be very thoughtful of her — for a man of his kind. The tears started; she could not help it.

"Thank you, Tom," she said, in her own pretty, womanly way; it was the first time she had spoken a natural word to him.

He drew her left hand over his knee and laid his own upon it. She still wore her wedding-ring.

"I was thinking," he said suddenly, "there 's something about this room. It reminds me of that one we had when we were boarding down South; that door would n't latch, either. But we did n't mind locking it."

"I know," she hurried to say. "And the shade was torn across lots — like this; just in the same place."

"There 's something sort of queer about the carpet, is n't there?" ventured Handel.

"It 's the same pattern," replied Mary, eagerly. "Three roses and a squash-vine; then a summer-house and a boat and a swan — just the same. Only those roses were blue, and this squash-vine is cerise, and that swan was pink. Otherwise it 's the very same!"

"And you chose this God-forsaken hole for that reason!" cried Handel.

She did not deny; she would not admit; and

now he went daring on. But his imperious voice had sunk to a half-articulate entreaty: "And the baby was beginning to walk — do you remember, Mary?"

For a moment he would have given half his life to unsay the words, so terrible to him was her outcry; then her voice, too, died away piteously.

"The little fellow used to lock the door and lock me out," persisted Handel.

"He used to kiss that squash-vine and the pink swan," added Mary in a whisper, "and he patted the blue roses — with his little — with his little fingers —"

She turned away her face and hid it on the cushions of the sofa-bed.

"Say, Mary, do you remember the day I first took him out with me horseback around the plantation? How he held on — like a man! with his hat hanging down his back!"

"He did n't wear any hat," corrected Mary. "He went bareheaded. He wore his blue sacque with the steel buttons. He said —"

"He said, 'Widy popper!'" interrupted Handel, "'widy popper!'" But there his own voice broke. He let go her hand quickly.

"Oh, my God! Tom," cried Mary, "I can't bear this!"

But when she looked she saw that she could bear it better than Tom. The man was weeping;

and he had hidden his face from her because he wept. He tried to say, —

"I did n't know, Mary — but we might bear it together — after all."

But the humble words denied themselves to him. Suddenly the master in him turned upon the woman, peremptorily, as his nature was.

"You shall come back to me!" he cried. "I say you shall! We have suffered too much! I say you shall put an end to it! You took me for better or worse! — Mary! Come here!"

He crushed aside the protest of her hands as if they had been flowers. He caught her and held her till she ceased to defy him and lay sobbing quietly.

"There!" he said. "Now go, if you want to. I 'm not a savage — although you used to think so. Go, or stay. Take your choice, Mary."

But Mary did not stir.

"In spite of the child?" he asked.

"Because of the child," she said.

On the landing they met the petitioner, who backed up against a mountain of laundry and took off her hat in a gentlemanly manner, but by divine grace she was restrained from asking questions; and they saw nobody else but the girl with the crimping-pins, who was "doing" her hair in the vestibule. The carriage was at the

door, and it had stopped raining. In the slant-light of a stormy sunset with a fair to-morrow beyond it, the two rode through the dripping, glittering town. Neither spoke. It was as if a word would wake a dream and hurl them back into a desolation whose pitiableness it was possible now for the first time to admit, and to which it would never be possible to refer.

When they got to the house the doctor was driving by. His face had the priestly look which it is sometimes given to men trained in the medical profession to wear.

"Living love 's the hardest thing to kill," he said, and then drove on.

When the housekeeper came to the door the Senator observed that he had brought the second Mrs. Handel home.

FÉE

It was a ruffian night. December was rioting through the village like a mob. The storm, which began at noon in subtle snow, had changed its mind before five o'clock, and become slapping sleet; this was now vicious, and had gone in league with the wind, which attacked the house in volleys. It was a comfortable house, as white as the snow that swept it; its opened green blinds were frozen back upon their fastenings. Long, opaque icicles hung from the front portico, and a frieze of shorter ones decorated the gutters on the roof. The path was obliterated an hour ago; drifts five feet high drowned the painted picket fence, and the wide street lay like a white river between the house and its nearest neighbor, a little to the left of opposite. The neighbor was an over-grown, gravel-colored building, bearing an uncertain air of publicity, but distinctly known among the villagers as The Hotel.

The white house (though it was one of the stout frames built a hundred years ago, when oak and honor were strong in the land) shook a little as the storm increased; and a hanging lamp in the living-room trembled on its chains above the

marble-topped table at which Miss Dawn sat before her open soapstone stove, trying to crochet an afghan as if it were a pleasant evening. She laid down her work, and called in a kindly, imperious tone: —

"Mary B., are you afraid?"

"Land, no!" answered the voice of an American maid-of-all-work from the kitchen — a voice quite as decided as that of the mistress. "Be you?"

"Not at all," replied Miss Dawn, with some access of manner. "I wish, though, you 'd pull the upper bolt on the front door. It throbs a good deal, and the snow gets in."

Now, Mary B. was singing, and she took unkindly to interruptions in the middle of a bar. Imperturbably she sang on: —

"Our hear-arts in mew-ew-chial love —

"When I get the dishes done, I will.

"The fe-el-low-sha-ape of ki-in-dred mi-inds —"

"Dear me!" cried the mistress, sharply. "What 's that?"

She dropped her afghan (it was what was called in those days a Persian afghan, being made of as many colors put together in as many ways as the imagination of the weaver could compass), and stood in the middle of the room, listening. She was a young-looking woman for

her age, which must have been a little over the chilly side of forty, and she had either the remains or the elements of some beauty, according as one interpreted her history to be that of a romance outlived or unlived. She was dressed in gray poplin of a faultless daintiness, with old Valenciennes lace at the wrists and throat. Her person, like her house, was neat to painfulness. Every inch of her and hers said, "Stand off!" to the little liberties and licenses of natural, warm home life. Plainly, the house held but two living souls, — an old maid's heart in the parlor, an old maid's will in the kitchen. As it was a manless, childless place, so it was a petless place — dogless, catless. Not even a canary had ever been known to hang in Miss Dawn's windows.

Whatever their mutual differences (of which they had enough to keep them alive and happy), Miss Dawn and Mary B. were united in a passionate and well-organized abhorrence of clutter. On this instinct, long since become a highly developed faculty, the two women expended vitality and intelligence enough to have routed an army or created a philanthropy. Once, indeed, a cousin's boy had come on a visit, but the child cried to go home the second day; and once a starving cat had got into the kitchen, but it was promptly fed and given to the neighbors. Once a hand-organ monkey had climbed into Miss

Dawn's bedroom while she was undressing. She hurried on a wrapper, as if the intruder had been a man, and politely showed the monkey downstairs.

"There 's some one at the front door!" cried Miss Dawn. She stood very straight and tall as she listened, every muscle in her firm body taut, every line in her strong face rigid, every gray hair she had expressed by the light of the hanging lamp — a grim figure, going on to her dark years with the best of life unknown and really undesired. One hardly knew whether to call it pathos or irony that this lonely, middle-aged, and unloved woman was called Miranda Dawn.

As she stepped sharply out to draw the bolt, the big front door opened, and the storm and a man blew in. He was a rough man, with evil in his eye, and Miss Miranda Dawn shrieked as promptly as a girl of twenty.

"The fe-el-low-sha-ape —" sang Mary B. But she stopped singing, and ran, like a man, to protect her mistress.

"Git out of this!" thundered Mary B. "You let my lady alon'! I 've got a bucket o' scaldin' bilin' water ready for ye, an' plenty more where this come from. I 'll parbile ye if you darst take another step in this house!"

As Mary B., with mighty, bared arms, lifted a pail of steaming water, and held it out straight

before her, the eye of the intruder measured the weapon as if it had been the muzzle of a revolver; then twinkled slightly, but did not drop.

"Don't scald it," he said quietly. "It 's 'most dead now. That 's why I 'm leavin' it. I don't want it on my mind. It 's such a pesky *little* thing. An' it 's so — so — derned white," he added, in an aggrieved tone.

He, too, thrust out his ragged arms. They held as straight as Mary B.'s. Within their soaked and unsavory embrace lay a little object, wet with snow and iced with sleet, limp with weakness, if not dead from exposure.

"It 's livin', though," observed the visitor, grudgingly.

"We don't want nothin' livin' in this house," spoke up Mary B. "We don't never keep critters."

She still held her pail of scalding water out before her; the steam writhed toward the little animal, who slightly stirred and moaned.

"You 'll burn it, Mary B.," protested her mistress, speaking for the first time. "What is the animal, sir — a cat?"

"It 's a rat," said Mary B., "a white rat. I 've hearn tell on 'em. Look out 't ain't wuss," she added mysteriously. "Anyhow, Mister, we don't want the critter, whatever it is. We don't keep critters. They clutter."

"They certainly are a great inconvenience," continued Miss Dawn, coldly. "I think you had better try some other house."

She put her hand on the door, and made as if she would shut the man, the animal, and the storm out at once and together.

"Lord!" said the man. "*Lord!* I see you through the winder-curting. I thought you was women-folks — Lord!"

He shuffled down the steps in the snow, turning his back squarely towards the lady, as if he enjoyed offering the insult.

"Come back!" said Miss Dawn, faintly. The color blew, scorching her cheek, chin, and brow. "Come back!" she repeated in a louder tone.

"The devil!" said the visitor, suddenly, looking down at the burden in his arms. "There ain't no time to lose. Let me by!" he cried.

Neither hand nor voice uprose to stay him; the man pushed by the two women, and strode, wet, dripping, muddy, dreadful as he was, across the spotless carpet, and straight to the soapstone stove, where the open fire was blazing high. Dashing down Miss Dawn's crochet-work from the marble table as he passed, he tore the Persian afghan from the needle, and wrapped it around and around a little sinking, freezing form, too weak, now, to moan or move.

"Devil take you!" he roared. "It 's too damn

white for a man to murder. If you *be* women-folks, turn to and save it!"

Before the terrified women could stir, protest, or reply, the big, wet feet of the visitor had "squashed" across the Brussels carpet, and the front door had slammed behind him.

"Bolt it!" panted Miss Dawn, leaning up against the wall. But Mary B., before the soap-stone stove, was on her knees, and not to pray. With shaking, angry hands she unfolded the Persian afghan.

"Miss Miran'," she whispered hoarsely, "it 's wuss 'n a rat. It 's a puppy."

Wincing, but resolute, Miss Miranda knelt stiffly down beside Mary B. There lay before her startled eyes a little being of a species as foreign to her experience as a dying baby. It was, in fact, a French toy-spaniel, possibly five months old, of a breed rare in this country, daintily born and perfectly formed, with hair as white as the flying snow with which the little thing was soaked; and, if one could have seen its eyes, they were blazing black, not a touch of albino in the whole delicate organization; the nose was small, and of a rich black; the paws were slender and covered with thick, white, curling fleece down to the claws. The dog may have weighed three pounds and a half; its ears were uncut, long, and fine; and one was slightly touched with tan, as if scorched.

Its neck was clasped by a studded collar from which the plate had been carefully removed; a small bell hung from the collar; the bell did not ring. The beautiful creature lay quite still, with half-closed, glazed eyes. Its paws stretched straight out; its heart-beats could not be discerned; its tongue was cold — in animals a fatal symptom.

"Get me the brandy!"

When this incredible command issued from Miss Dawn's lips, Mary B., from sheer intellectual consternation, obeyed it; and she ran, too.

A few drops of warm brandy and water filtered through the set teeth of the dying dog. It gasped and stirred, and collapsed again.

"A hot-water bag!" commanded Miss Dawn, "a *warm* hot-water bag! milk! a teaspoon! beef-tea! And be quick about it! Beef-tea, I say!"

"Miss Dawn," shrilled Mary B., "you may suit yourself to another hired girl!"

But, running, she obeyed again. And when she came back with these preposterous orders, Mary's B.'s brain whirled in her head, and her soul stood still in her body. For, there, flat upon the floor beside the open fire, located exactly in a puddle of slush made and left by the feet of the muddy man, sat Miss Miranda Dawn, with the white dog in her arms. She held the little crea-

ture against her full, warm breast. One of its claws had unconsciously torn the Valenciennes lace at her throat. Its limp, wet body made a great splash against her silver poplin heart, and its dripping hair and stiff, soaked paws had tracked her handsome dress to ruin from throat to hem.

"It 's coming to!" she cried excitedly. "It needed to be life-warm, not fire-warm. And it 's coming to! That teaspoon 's too big," she added peremptorily. "Get one of the after-dinner coffees, so I can put the beef-tea down its little throat. It 's going to live!"

Whether it were the Persian afghan, the fire, the womanly bosom, the brandy, beef-tea, milk, warm hot-water bag, or gold-lined coffee-spoon, cannot be averred; but the composite result was that the dog made up its mind to live. When it had reached this decision, the French spaniel turned feebly around in Miss Dawn's lap, slowly lifted its weak head, and firmly fixed the lady with its strong black eye. Miss Dawn returned the look with a strange emotion; and as the two regarded each other for a long moment with a certain solemnity, she felt that the spaniel's eyes challenged her — demanded of her what her nature was; rated her reception of itself by a high code, foreign to her knowledge; judged her by an unknown standard; and somewhat doubtfully

accepted her as the savior of its life, if not altogether as the mistress of its heart.

When the spaniel had finished his inspection of Miss Miranda's face, he feebly raised himself and put his fore paws about her neck. Then the unexpected happened. For the dog, not knowing how particular the lady was about such things, but being a dog, and having received hospitality in a mortal strait, extended his rose-leaf tongue, and deliberately kissed the old maid, and on the mouth, too.

"Oh, my gracious!" cried Miss Miranda Dawn. "Oh, this won't do! Why, it — it *is n't proper*."

The gale died at midnight, and by six o'clock the shovels and ploughs of the village were out and creaking with New England energy. The white world was traversable and comfortable by breakfast time, and the morning mail was no more delayed than was necessary to sustain its self-respect in view of the blizzard. The furnace-boy brought Miss Dawn a crumpled letter, whose wet and blotted envelope she opened with reluctant curiosity. In all her placid and decorous life she had never received a letter at all like this.

At the Hoetell.

I take me Pen in hand to write you these fue Words It blue so darn bad I had to Put Up but

ime Off come Mornin Ef i hadnent of thort you was wimmen i wouldnent of left it i ment to sell it to a Cullidge i kno so help Me god i did They cut em up to amuje the Stoodints i thort youde like to no it. I couldnent do it come to think it was so pesky littel. And so dern white. I didnent want it On My Minde. Heres hoppin youle treat it decent bein its so plaggy littel And so damm white so no more at presint youle never sea me heerafter from

Yours obejuntly.

THE TRAMP THAT THORT YOU WAS WIMMINFOLKS.

Again, as on the evening before, Miss Dawn's face blazed before the rebuke of this man from the nether world. As she laid the letter down, her calm hand shook. She was an intelligent woman, and had always thought herself a kind one; she belonged to one or two humane societies, and had gone so far as to send five dollars to some persons engaged in the commendable object of checking the scientific practice to which the dog-stealer so grimly referred. She did this, as she subscribed to orphan asylums, conscientiously. Precisely because she did not care for the society of children or animals, she purposed to do her duty by them. The dog-bandit's letter was like a slap in the face. To soothe the smart of it, she picked up the dog from the Persian

afghan, last night desecrated, and now consecrated; for the little creature had already claimed this elaborate piece of fancy-work as his own private property, and it did not even occur to Miss Dawn to raise any objection.

"Why, he *wants* it!" she said to Mary B.

The incidents of the first night spent by the little French waif beneath that New England roof will never be revealed to history. They were and remain solemn secrets between Miss Dawn and the puppy. In an astonished universe they were revealed last to Mary B., who had pugnaciously refused, from the outset, to accept any responsibility for the new member of the family. Before there could be any mistake about it, Mary B. hastened to engrave the law on tables of stone.

"It 's your critter. Don't expect no critterin' of me. Ye 'll get sick of it soon enough. Tell ye do, do yer own critterin'."

Miss Dawn looked long into the black, black eyes of the little dog, who regarded her now as fixedly as if he had been a recording angel, now as elusively as if he had been Ariel bent on a mysterious errand from an elfin world.

"You poor little beast!" said Miss Dawn, aloud. "I don't know any more what to do with you than if you were an angel — or — or a baby — or a fiend!" finished the lady, unexpectedly.

For the dog, with the expression of a cherub and the agility of a demon, had taken one of the sudden leaps and darts peculiar to his age and race, and forcibly seized the lady by the slightly Roman nose, which, having taken distinctly between his opal teeth, he ended by kissing violently.

"Oh, but look here — you — really, you *must n't*, you know!" pleaded Miss Miranda. She lifted her prim hand to strike. But the spaniel, swiftly calmed to a heavenly attitude, transfixed her with the eyes of angelic innocence, and promptly turned over on his back, and held up his four white hands and feet to deprecate her displeasure, meanwhile smiling seraphically into her frowning face.

"I suppose you *mean* well," gasped Miss Miranda. Her hand fell. She could as easily have struck a bird or a butterfly. "And I suppose you meant well all night," continued the lady, in a tone of dark significance. "Why did n't you stay down cellar by the furnace?" she demanded, in fierce underbreath, lest Mary B. should overhear. "What on earth did you have to yell so for? I tramped up and down two flights for you fourteen times," admitted Miss Dawn, in a guilty whisper. "And when I took you up in the kitchen, by the stove, what did you yell *there* for? What did you do it *for?* I have n't slept three

hours, you — you — you — poor little creature! And what on earth am I to do with you to-night, I 'd like to know? You 've got to have a bath, too. Who under the canopy is going to do that for you?"

The dog smiled pleasantly in reply, and, effusively putting his arms about her neck, jumped overboard on the other side. In the process he discovered the gold chain of her eye-glasses, which fully occupied him for some time. When Miss Dawn turned her attention to him again, the little Frenchman was hanging over the back of her chair, inextricably entangled in the long chain, in the meshes of which he was quietly strangling to death. The glasses were in twenty pieces on the floor.

The second night began like the first, in a will-to-will contest between the lady and the dog, who shrieked to high heaven from the cellar, summoned the forces of the earth from the kitchen, arraigned Providence from the back entry, and called down maledictions on his hostess from every nook and corner in which she had ventured to bestow him. At one o'clock, faint with vigil, and chilled with her travels up and down in the winter night, Miss Miranda Dawn, clad in a blue wrapper, and with her hair in long braids, desperately fled the kitchen with the dog and a market-basket in her arms. With guilty,

silent feet she crept upstairs, ignoring the awful voice of Mary B. from her bedchamber.

"Put it out in the bar-arn! I won't have the critter a-critterin' up my kitchen another livin' ni-ight! You may suit yerself to another hired gir-irl!"

As dexterously as a burglar, the lady reached and closed the door of her own room. Panting, she bolted it twice and turned the key. Shivering, she wrapped the trembling creature in the Persian afghan, and laid it in the market-basket on the floor beside the register. With chattering teeth, she put out the light and crept into bed. For a few moments the dog lay quite still, running his pink tongue in and out of his mouth happily, and sighing for joy. Then it occurred to him that he was the only member of the family sleeping in market-baskets, and it appeared that he resented the indignity. With one unerring and beautiful bound through the dark, he landed upon the foot of Miss Dawn's own maiden couch. The Persian afghan in which he was wound came sprawling after him. The lady gasped, but submitted to her fate, and, covering the little animal again assiduously with the afghan, allowed him to remain where he was.

"Mary B. will never know it," she thought.

She was about sinking into a severely earned nap, the first since two o'clock of the night pre-

ceding, when she was aroused by something cold and then by something warm deliberately examining her face. Before she could express a contrary opinion, or even offer any advice on the subject, a black nose and a white paw had pushed and clawed away the bedclothes, and the spaniel had curled himself against the lady's neck, where he clung — a fluffy ball of clean, white fur — confident, warm, loving, as sure of his welcome as a child of its rights in its mother, or weakness of its claim on strength.

With burning cheeks Miss Miranda Dawn threw off the bedclothes and seized the little intruder. But the dog, weak from vigil and fright, was already asleep; and the old maid's heart failed her before the sight: she could not do it; she let him stay. After one small sigh of ecstasy, the little being had subsided from his terror and his torment, and nothing was heard from him till seven o'clock next day.

Miss Miranda had studied French at the academy thirty years ago, and in deference to his nationality (vouched for by a compatriot, the furnace-boy) she called the spaniel Fée. She was always more or less uncertain about the accent, and turned it both ways when she wrote the name, or else set it up very straight as a compromise between the two. And she remained permanently

uncertain of the gender. But, nevertheless, the name and the dog got on very well together. And there was no mistake about *his* gender; he was the most positively masculine little creature, for a toy-dog, that ever kissed and cuddled his way into a lonely woman's heart. He was wilful, capricious, lordly, cross, tyrannical; he was adorable, faithful, loving, tender, and devoted. He was twenty dogs in one day. He was haughty and submissive; cold and affectionate; reserved and demonstrative; elusive and clinging; dignified and hilarious — either at all times, or all at any time. Education he had either never received, or, in the shock of fate, had lost what he had; and the processes of discipline necessary to his kind were as foreign to Miss Dawn's experience as the care of a teething baby or the oversight of a Chinese kindergarten. Into the old maid's serene and exquisite home this little dash of love, youth, and animal vitality came like a tongue of white fire, flashing and burning its way through all precedent, restraint, or endurance. What he chose, he did; and what he conceived, he chose. His imagination developed at an early stage into incredible proportions. It would have been difficult for an ordinary human intelligence to invent a decimal fraction of the methods of making himself unpopular in which the spaniel rioted. A perfectly arranged room at once put

the whole ingenuity of his nature on its mettle. Order was his constitutional foe. The spinster's comfortable home, which was not without something of elegance, by the standards of the village, now became the scene of a prolonged contest between law and defiance, between tradition and affection, at which her friends and neighbors looked on in grinning stupefaction. One eligible widower went so far as to say that the dog was making a woman of her, and began to call. But Miss Dawn did not encourage the widower; she did not value the species.

For the first time in eight years of service with Miss Dawn, Mary B. found her own expressed will (and Mary B. had what might have been called an old-red-sandstone will) boldly, even chronically disregarded. She had begun by threatening to drown the puppy, and, indeed, this threat was offered in grim good faith.

"If you lay your hands on him, I shall arrest you for murder," replied Miss Miranda.

"An' she 'd do it, too," admitted Mary B. to the French furnace-boy.

She returned to the battle by a flank movement:

"If this here critter 's goin' to set foot in my kitchen ag'in, I give my notice for a fortnit come Chusedy."

"Very well, Mary B. Let me know as soon as you have made up your mind."

"He 's et up a pound of chops an' a custard puddin' an' a box of Cape Ann turkey, an' upsot the ker'sene can an' three flatirons. Last night he brought my tea-kittle slap down. I wisht it hed scalt him to death; no such luck."

"Mary B., I have *told* you! You *must* turn the spout of the tea-kettle the other way. Why, he might get terribly burned!"

"He 's chewed up your best Jap'nese screen; there 's a hole in it big enough to let a polar bear through. Hain't taken notice of that upper hall-carpet, have you, lately? He 's clawed out two breadths. I wish you 'd go look into the spare chamber — jest *look:* I would n't ask no more. He 's upsot my bluin'-bottle into the milk-pan, I forgot that. I see him this mornin' asleep in your walkin'-hat."

"Yes; so did I. How cunning he did look!"

"He 's tore three aprons and two dresses offen me this week. Look a' that there silver poplin o' yourn he spiled first night the critter come!"

"Yes, I know. What a beautiful quilted comforter it makes for him since we dyed it blue! I don't know what he would have done without it. There 's enough left to line his basket, too."

"Darn the critter!" exploded Mary B., with hot and angry tears.

"You 've lived with me eight years," replied

Miss Dawn; "I knew you had a temper. I did not know you were profane."

"Nor you don't know the cherubims above is profane," protested Mary B. "They would be if they done housework with this critter, I can tell 'em."

At this moment Fée made one of his unexpected and extraordinary leaps, and landed on Mary B.'s head (she was stooping, with her dustpan), whence, leaning over bewitchingly, he warmly kissed the girl's ear till she cried out upon him. He never showed any disposition to be more familiar with Mary B., who had rather a pretty ear, but whose list of personal attractions ended with it.

"He 's beginning to love you!" cried Miss Dawn, jealously.

"Let him do it if he darst!" muttered Mary B. But she put the dog down rather gently, after all. Mary B. did not have many kisses.

The repulsed spaniel regarded the girl in forgiving perplexity for some moments, with his head turned far on the left side. Then, like a being with wings in his nerves, he flew through the air to his mistress, coming down hard (it was just after a hearty breakfast), and walking over her as calmly as if she had been a mantelpiece or a centre-table or any of his favorite promenades. But Miss Dawn was long past the point

of indicating to the little dog that anything he might, could, would, or should choose to do was inconvenient to her.

"You may kiss *me*," she whispered.

Fée sat up straight on her lap, and looked at her solemnly with deepening, beautiful eyes; held out one white hand politely to be shaken, then the other, withdrawing one daintily to touch her cheek with it for a hesitating, questioning moment; then his soft face dropped shyly into her neck, with a movement so uncanine as to be startling. Only the most sensitive of children are seen to take attitudes so tender, so delicate, so exquisite as this. After a prelude of such embarrassed and abandoned tenderness, the white spaniel raised himself, and laid his face against the lady's cheek, waiting for a space to be sure of his welcome before he poured out his rapturous soul in kisses. For Fée, who had accepted the old maid's ownership at first out of the necessity of the situation rather than from personal preference, was now her most adoring friend. As she had grown tender, he had become true. As the woman developed in her, the spaniel grew in him; and the spaniel is "all love, and of love most worthy." Something in the heredity of the high-born little creature differentiated him from most superior dogs whom one may have the honor of knowing. All dogs have in-

dividuality as marked as that in men, but few have personality as memorable as that of this rare little being. His beauty, his refinement, his grace, his wilfulness, his bird-like motions, his whimsical moods, his peculiar reserve and his adorable abandon, his docility and his deviltry, his splendid vitality and his extreme delicacy of organization, came into that prim and dogless household like messengers from an undiscovered planet spinning through a system the existence of which had never been suspected, even on a working hypothesis.

A colder heart than Miss Miranda Dawn's might have gone down before the French spaniel, and in six weeks hers had surrendered unconditionally. To put it within the force of the phrase, she had become the joyful slave of this little white tyrant.

The terrible power of love over loneliness had done its mighty work. Her hitherto peaceful and immaculate house rocked with his noise and trembled with his disorder. He lorded over it and her, leaving havoc and happiness behind him. For him she endured, for him she performed, all things. She fed, she bathed, she brushed, she combed, she unsnarled. She watched, guarded, caressed, adored. On occasions she hired a horse and buggy from the hotel to take him to ride. She took him on long walks, dis-

tinguished in blue ribbons, and personally conducted at the end of a leash, lest unspecified disaster should befall him. At times she recalled the grim words of the dark unknown who had stormed in out of the blizzard with the dog in his arms. She laid her cheek against the spaniel's velvet fur; she smiled as his white little body turned over under her chin, and he hid his face in her neck; or perhaps he lifted his hands and feet to deprecate her (a favorite attitude of Fée's) when he had achieved some especially ingenious misdemeanor; and then she gazed into the dark eyes of the dog, in which fathoms of tenderness sank below her measure, and visions smote her, before the awful vividness of which her heart stood still. At such moments the Massachusetts woman fell into the way of saying, under her breath: —

"Harvard College shall never get you!"

It seemed to her that she had touched the abyss of human misery one day when she came home from a short absence, and Fée was not to be found. This happened just before Mary B. returned. The manner of Mary B.'s departure was like this.

One summer night — for it was now early June, and the little dog might perhaps have been eleven or twelve months old — Miss Dawn had felt obliged to part from her idol long enough to attend a church strawberry festival, not a quarter

of a mile away (where she could see the house if it took fire, and get home in time to save him), and Mary B., burdened to the earth with solemn injunctions for the care of the dog, was left in charge. The mistress returned earlier than she was expected (an experiment recommended to all mistresses of households), and found the house apparently empty. Mary B. was out, and it appeared that Fée was not in.

After fifteen minutes of frantic summons, tender, commanding, appealing, terrified, a wretched little figure slowly crawled out from under the kitchen table, and prostrated itself, with tail and ears hanging, abjectly at the lady's feet. With passionate outcries of endearment, she caught him to her heart, but let him go again succinctly. To her cold inquiries what he had done *now*, the dog, dripping and matted with some unknown and sticky substance, the nature of which she could not divine and dared not investigate, replied by wagging his handsome tail feebly and shaking his wet and gluey head — like a person who could not answer an embarrassing question. At this unfortunate moment Mary B. turned her back-door key and entered the kitchen.

"I don't know — I 'm very sorry — I can't imagine what Fée 's done this time," pleaded the mistress.

"I ken!" cried Mary B., in terrible tones. She strode to the kitchen table, and held a large yellow bowl straight out before her, as her way was. "He 's made a bed in it, and be'n asleep in my whole-wheat bread-pan that I sot to rise. He clawed off the napkin, and laid right slap down in the dough — that 's what he done. And here — look a' my pantry, will you? He upsot the molasses-jug, and when he 'd got stuck up all over with that, the critter turned to on my bread to get dry — *that 's* what he done. And *now*, Miss Miran'," added Mary B., "you *may* suit yerself to another hired girl."

"Fée," murmured Miss Dawn, faintly, "I 've got to punish you — I really have."

With trembling hands she found one of the willow switches for such case made and provided. They were never easy to find, for Fée chewed them up as fast as they were cut, and dropped the pieces down the register, which, in warm weather, he opened for the purpose.

"I must whip you," wailed Miss Dawn, "I *must*, you — you — poor little innocent — ignorant — beautiful —"

The willow switch swished through the air.

But "ere the fatal stroke descended," the spaniel promptly turned over on his back, held up four paws, and deprecated her. Miss Miranda Dawn laid down the switch. She took the

culprit up, and carried him tenderly to the laundry, where she scrubbed off layers upon layers of dough and molasses, and wrapped him anxiously in the Persian afghan, lest he should take cold.

This time Mary B. was as thorough as her word, and she left next day. For two weeks Miss Dawn and the little dog kept house alone, with such emergency women as a merciful Providence threw in their way. Fifteen nights after the strawberry festival, the kitchen door opened with a slam, and Mary B. walked in. She looked colossal. A dingy old woman was washing dishes in a manner not to be described in good society. Mary B. walked up to the sink.

"Here, you," she commanded, "git out of here! I 've had a gewhollopin' vacation, and I don't want nobody in my kitchen no more. You go right along!"

No conversation upon this painful subject ever took place between the mistress and the maid. Mary B. finished the dishes decently and in order, and the only remark which she made was: —

"Where 's the critter? He ken hev her cookies — it 's all they 're good for. Land!" added Mary B., in the voice of one who was undergoing suffocation, "the critter 's a-kissin' of me! Acts 's ef he was glad to see me home! Why, you pesky little, plaguy little, *dear* little critter!"

Then Mary B. began to sing "Blest be-ee the

ti-ie that binds"; and she sang till ten o'clock that night.

Now, it was during the absence of Mary B., as we said, that the tremendous event which we are about to relate occurred. Miss Dawn had, with much hesitation, accepted an invitation to dinner on an occasion to which Fée had received no cards. The spaniel was left in the care of the reigning emergency woman, a person of pronounced religious character, and thought by Miss Miranda to be competent to preserve the dearest dog in the world from harm for two hours. When she came home, she found this pious person in the parlor, entertaining a colporteur. The front door was open, and Fée was gone.

Only the dogless will smile at the anguish which followed this discovery. In half an hour the neighbors, the tradesmen, the livery stables, the telephone, and the police were in agitated activity. Miss Miranda, with drawn lips and blanched cheeks, organized a desperate and determined search which must have discovered a lost child, but which might or might not track down a stray dog. Half the village turned out — some to scoff and some to sympathize, but all to help. The dreadful afternoon waxed and waned, and Fée was not to be found. Miss Miranda's lips grew purple. She thought of the dog-bandit. She thought of that sentence in his let-

ter. She was not, by nature, an imaginative woman, but love had lent imagination, as it always does; and hers awoke. The hells of the laboratories smoked before her; in their abysses already she saw her idol writhe. She wrung her hands and knotted them, half in prayer and half in curses.

Now, at six o'clock she passed the hotel on her way home, raised her haggard eyes indifferently, and then stood still, and began to cry like a child, right in the street where she stood; for she was very tired.

A gentleman, a stranger, was on the hotel piazza, with his chair tipped back. In his lap, traitorously contented, angelically beautiful, sat Fée. At his mistress's cry the dog sprang and ran. Scolding, laughing, crying, kissing, she buried her wet face in his little warm, white body. Her first articulate words were: —

"Harvard College shall *never* get you!"

She started for home, with the dog in her arms. She had not looked at the man.

"Madam — I beg your pardon — is this your dog?"

She had now reached her own gate, but at these words she stopped. The gentleman stood with lifted hat, and the late, slanting light showed all the gray there was in his hair. She turned, and their eyes met.

"*John!*" she cried.

She had found the dog. That John Ferdinand should miraculously appear upon the spot seemed an inferior incident. She was quite composed.

"What are you here for?" asked the woman.

"You," replied the man.

"You are twenty years too late," said Miss Miranda Dawn. She turned, and went up the path, clasping the white spaniel to her heart. When she got into the house, she found that John Ferdinand had followed her.

"It was a misunderstanding," he pleaded manfully — "a mistake. I 've come to explain, Miranda — to ask forgiveness — to ask —"

"The less you ask, the better," answered Miss Miranda. She looked straight into the eyes of the man whom she had tried all her life not to love. She stood tall and fine. That possible beauty which seemed always to hover about her settled, and rested on her for the moment, like a bird, or some flying, evanescent life. "I am quite happy," she said.

"So you said twenty years ago — at the races — don't you remember? I see you carry the colors yet," smiled the Yale man, pointing to the blue ribbon on the collar of the dog.

"You are ungenerous," replied the old maid; but she spoke so quietly that his face fell; he could have wished to see her agitated or embar-

rassed. Plainly, she was neither. But, as she spoke, she let the dog down, and behold, before her jealous and astonished eyes, Fée leaped promptly to the arms of John Ferdinand, whom he proceeded to caress with enthusiasm untempered by the slightest regard for her personal feelings.

"There, there, Ariel," rebuked Mr. Ferdinand, brusquely, "you 've expressed yourself enough for one day."

"His name is Fée," insisted the lady, coldly.

"It was n't when he was my dog," answered the gentleman, in an even voice.

As soon as these terrible words were uttered, John Ferdinand cursed himself for his folly, and would have given every dog in Massachusetts to recall them.

She turned so white that he sprang to support her, lest she should fall to the floor; but she repulsed him with an admirable dignity.

"Prove it!" she demanded.

"He was stolen from me last winter — just before that blizzard. I was in Providence. My landlady left the door open."

"That 's not evidence."

"He wore a studded collar with a bell to it. The bell had lost its tongue. Of course the plate was removed. You 'll find my initials engraved inside the bell."

"I thought it was some trade-mark," panted poor Miss Miranda. "I saw them one day. It never occurred — I never thought —"

Mortification sat upon the countenance of John Ferdinand. His initials! A trade-mark! It had not even occurred to her that they *were* his initials. And he had rather pitied her all his life as the girl whom he might have married if he had insisted on it.

"I am not — satisfied. I must have — more proof," pleaded Miss Miranda. She had caught the dog from his arms, and held it fiercely.

"Ariel," observed Mr. Ferdinand, incidentally, "come here, sir."

Like a flash of white fire the spaniel sprang at the order.

"Which would you rather do, Ariel — go to Harvard or die?"

The dog promptly turned over on his back and simulated stark death so dexterously that Miss Miranda shook with horror at the sight.

"Ariel, say your prayers, sir. Kneel down and pray for the Republican party."

The dog kneeled down and devoutly crossed his paws on the nearest chair, and lifted up his pretty face piously.

"I have never taught him to be irreligious and profane!" blazed Miss Miranda. But now the woman began to sob. She had borne too much.

Majestic to the man, she was piteous for the dog's sake.

"Have n't you done enough?" she cried passionately. "Would you take the dog, too? Oh," she wailed, "he 's all I 've got — all I 've ever had! If you take away my dog, I shall hate you!" added Miss Miranda.

As she spoke, he knew in his heart that she would. Her eyes stabbed the man whom she had tried all her life not to love. Her old friend looked puzzled.

"Keep the dog. I shall not take him from you now," he said slowly. "Trust me — if you can."

"I did that once," replied the old maid, coldly. She clasped the dog, and left the room.

The returning lover sat still, with hanging head. Plainly, he had got his courting to do all over again. This was a prospect which had not presented itself to him. He had expected to begin where he left off.

"Mr. Ferdinand and Isabella is here," announced Mary B. "And there 's that there widderer a gewhollopin' up the path with his kid gloves on."

Miss Dawn, in her Yale-blue silk poplin (a substitute for the silver-gray on which Fée had wrought destruction), and cooling off towards the

top in a white muslin waist and blue necktie, came down the stairs with bright cheeks and girlish eyes. She had been none too civil to John Ferdinand, who nevertheless came to the house twice a day, and every day, and stayed till he got ready to go. He said that he came to see his dog. Quaking with terror lest he should exercise his legal rights over her darling, Miranda Dawn submitted to the emergency. The eligible widower, perceiving an incredible rival drop like a live wire from a clear sky, renewed his discouraged devotion; and the old maid's house grew dizzy with the voices and the whims of two obstinate men, each determined to win at the other's expense. If Miss Miranda flirted like a girl with the widower for a week or two, no woman and few men could blame her. But the addresses of this eligible person were refused in plain English one evening in the pleasant living-room, beside the marble-topped table, under the swinging lamp. And John Ferdinand, holding his dog out on the piazza, under the clematis, had the undeserved satisfaction of being involuntary witness to the close of the scene.

Mary B., in the kitchen, was singing, "The fe-el-low-shee-eep —" as John Ferdinand came in. She had acquired a pleasing habit of dwelling on this line of her favorite hymn when the two gentlemen were calling together.

"Here 's Ariel," observed Mr. Ferdinand, in an anxious and aimless manner.

"Come to me, Fée," replied Miss Miranda, positively.

"We must call him Fée-Ariel," suggested the gentleman.

"How particularly clumsy!" objected Miss Miranda. "I *might* compromise on Fariel."

"He needs discipline," continued Mr. Ferdinand, cheerfully. "You had almost spoiled him past redemption. He needed a man. Come and see him stand on his head."

"I do not *wish* to see him stand on his head," returned Miss Miranda, icily. "It will give him a headache."

"He used to have a passion for stylographic pens," proceeded Ferdinand, pleasantly. "He ate up three for me. I broke him of it altogether."

"He 's only eaten five since last February," replied the lady, calmly. "He seems to like them better than chop-bones. But I have most trouble about the things he brings when people are here — shoes, you know, and rubbers; hair-brushes, and articles which are not at all proper. I find them in the parlor and on the stairs. He always brought some dreadful article when the — that other gentleman called."

"His moral character has gone to the devil under your training," insisted the man.

"At least," observed Miss Miranda, "he does not swear. Fée!" she cried in a terrible voice, and whirling about suddenly, "Fée! What *have* you done *now?*"

Fée dragged something laboriously across the floor, laid the offering at the lady's feet, and looked up into her face with an agreeable smile. She stooped to take it from him, but the dog growled and held on tight. Between his paws and teeth lay Miss Miranda's bedroom slipper — an old blue Japanese slipper, slender and embroidered, but flat at the heels and down at the side — an unattractive though maidenly article, which no mortal man had ever seen. Crimson and indignant, the lady raised the blue slipper to strike. But Fée turned over on his back, held up his paws, and deprecated her. She could not hit that expression of celestial innocence. With burning cheeks she left the room to put the slipper away. When she returned, she found a black silk stocking, a linen collar, and a tooth-brush ornamenting the floor at Mr. Ferdinand's feet. Fée stood proudly over these trophies, amiably wagging his tail to call public attention to them.

"Mr. Ferdinand and Isabella is here *again*," announced Mary B., in a gloomy tone, one evening in the young September, "and the critter 's with him."

"I 'll come," replied Miss Miranda, drearily. She was very unhappy. John Ferdinand had taken Fée to walk, and kept him three hours. She entered the living-room without a smile, and sat down under the swinging lamp. It was a cool evening, and a light pine fire was laughing in the soapstone stove. She clasped the dog, and gazed into the fire. She did not try to entertain Mr. Ferdinand. Dark suspicion clutched at her heart. Was he going to claim his property, after all? For the first time in her life she understood how one may strike out and stab at a person with something sharp. The emotion which surged through her might be love, it might be hate. It seemed as if it would take no more than the force of a seaweed to deflect it either way. She was engulfed. She felt asphyxiated, like a drowning person.

John Ferdinand sat down beside her, and the dog moved slightly towards him. Miss Miranda dropped her arms listlessly. The spaniel turned back, and climbed to her shoulder, and hid his face in her neck. Her lips trembled, and one strong, slow tear started down her cheek. Fée kissed it off and regarded her with a perplexed expression. After a moment's doubt, the dog jumped from her shoulder to her lap, hesitated, slid over towards his old master, crept back to his new mistress, and so vibrated between the two,

uncertain and troubled. As if the problem were too much for him, he jumped to the floor.

Then a light touch summoned their eyes. Fée put one paw on the man's hand, one on the woman's, and stood straight, gazing solemnly at both.

"He 's got the only solution," said John Ferdinand, unexpectedly. "You can't live without the dog, and I can't live without you. What are we going to do about it, Miranda?"

She shook her head. She could not trust herself to speak. It seemed to her that if she raised an eyelash she should waste herself before his look. For the eternal power of love over loneliness had done its mighty work. She might do anything. She might even give him his own dog. Old, sacred words came curiously to her mind: There are new heavens and a new earth. But when his lips found hers, there came to her mind no words at all.

The spaniel still stood solemnly before the two; his deep eyes regarded them, now fixedly like a guardian angel, now mysteriously like a being from an elfin world.

HIS FATHER'S HEART

The Rev. Eliakim Penrose came out from the wood-shed with his lean arms full of wood; it was red oak, hard to the heart; he knew, because he had sawed it all, and split some of it himself; he could not have afforded to burn wood if the red oak in the pasture had not died. This was the pasture that went with the parsonage, and brought in as much as forty dollars some years from neighbors' cows. Mr. Penrose looked upon the death of the red oak as a direct interference of Providence in his behalf; for the winter had proved brutally cold. None but a poor man — perhaps none but a poor minister — could know how hard it was to keep a house warm enough for an invalid wife — an old, loosely articulated wooden parsonage, shivering between a church and a cemetery, and flogged by every wind that lashed the highest hilltop in the country. As a matter of course, there was no furnace. The boy used to say that some day he should put one in for his father and mother; but he had not spoken of it lately. There were a good many things the lad did not notice as he used to do. College life is either a whirlwind or a whirlpool; a boy is

swirled up, or swept down — in either case he is at the mercy of a rotary motion too swift and too strong for the minds of his elders to follow without effort.

It should be said at once of Mr. Penrose that he had systematically made the effort. No elderly, scholarly man, prisoned in the secluded life of a country parish, and bound by the handcuffs of the theological idea, ever tried harder to be the comrade of his son. Perhaps few (or so it seemed to him) had more pathetically failed. The minister wondered in his sensitive way why this was. He assumed that it was his own fault.

"I 'm not modern enough for the boy," he thought. He had reached and passed the point where he admitted to himself that an unlikeness wide enough to thrust the two apart existed between himself and his only child.

The boy had been named after his father; but he took early occasion to resent the circumstance.

"The fellows call me 'Likim," he protested. "I don't like it and I won't have it. Thunder and beeswax, Father! Why did n't you call me Leviticus or Solomon's Song, and done with it? It 's no sort of a name to tag on to a live boy. It is n't — why, it is n't *fair!*" cried the lad.

Something in the secular side of the minister's nature admitted that there was force in this ad-

jective; but he urged, not without a gentle dignity: —

"It is your father's name, my son. It was my father's name before me. You have sprung from a line of ministers. You have a godly ancestry."

"Then give me an ungodly one!" blazed the boy. "I 'm not the pious sort. You know that, Father. I tell you I 'm not going through the world with the Old Testament buckled on me like a bag-tag. Why did n't you call me after Uncle Harry? *He* was n't a Bible fellow."

"I did n't know but you might have liked to bear your father's name," replied the Rev. Eliakim Penrose, gently; "but never mind."

He yielded quickly and kindly, as he always did to any demand of the lad's that was not what he would have called "devoid of principle." The boy assumed his uncle's name, and held to it. That was the scapegrace uncle, the dark splash on a white, family mantle. Harry Penrose the past had gone to pieces, in fact; being a drinking man and a wanderer, he had lost his way in life, and sunk in some Western brawl out of which he had never emerged. But the minister's son took his unhappy uncle's name upon himself with an insouciance of which it were impossible to say whether it meant more obtuseness or most bravado.

"Since you choose it, then redeem it," said the father, with a lifting of his chin.

"Oh, yes," the lad had answered, lightly, "I 'll redeem it."

The afternoon was of a cruel bleakness, and the wet snow had begun to freeze. The Reverend Mr. Penrose slipped as he staggered under his big armful of red oak. In fact, he slid and fell. But no one saw him, for the invalid's room was on the other side of the house, and the "cheap girl," whose variant types slammed in and out of the parsonage kitchen, was not likely to concern herself. The particular specimen on that occasion was known as Fleecy Ann. Fleecy Ann did say when the old gentleman had picked up his oak sticks and had come into the kitchen:

"You 're messin' up my floor. Why, you 're all wet! Had a tumble? Ain't hurt, be you?"

Fleecy Ann wiped off his shoulder and arm and coat tail with her dish-towel; it did not occur to her to offer to take the wood.

"You 'll not mention to Mrs. Penrose that I met with this little mishap," observed the minister, stiffly. "It would only disturb her. Thank you, Fleecy Ann. I am not at all injured, thank you, only shaken a trifle."

He passed on into the narrow entry where the big wood-box stood outside his wife's room. He

did not pour the wood into the box, although he was trembling with the jar he had received, so that he could scarcely hold the oak sticks; he put them softly one by one into their places. Sarah could not bear noise very well. He placed the wood like jack-straws in a game where they must be laid down as lightly as they are taken up. He stood when he had done this to his full height. He was a tall man, and had been meant by nature for a vigorous or even a merry one: the embers in his eyes were still capable of sparkle; but about his mouth the red-hot iron of life had graven deep. He was so tall that he had to stoop to enter the low door of his wife's room. He came in with a quick, quiet: —

"More wood, Sarah? Plenty here."

"Thank you, Mr. Penrose," replied the invalid, absently. "I am not cold."

In twenty-five years of married life she had never accustomed herself to say Eliakim, and 'Likim she thought far too frivolous a corruption for so good and great a man. She did not notice his splashed coat, as he had expected or feared; her patient blue eyes reached to him, but did not dwell. He perceived at once that she was imprisoned in some thought or event which excluded him.

"Anything wrong?" he asked quickly He drew a bony, wooden armchair with an ema-

ciated Turkey-red cushion to the side of her sofa. A cotton comforter covered her, and in turn a shrunken, knitted afghan tried to cover it. She was an uncomplaining woman, who had once been pretty, and who was not without a consciousness of both these facts.

"Let 's have it, Sarah," he demanded, with some decision; for she dallied with what she had to say, and delayed, and that fretted him. His nerves were always on the watch for a new strain. Care had never let him alone long enough in all his life for him to forget it.

"Deacon Ledd drove by and came in." The wife hesitated. "He stopped while you were out sawing wood. He brought a letter."

The minister silently held out his thin hand, but hers retained the letter, while she said in a dull voice: —

"It had been in his pocket for three days. I do wish those post-office people would stop giving our mail to the neighbors. They *mean* right," she added, with the habit of the religious mind to excuse the faults and follies of an unsanctified world. "Of course they *thought* they were doing us a kindness. But that 's Thistleton. We ought to have got this last Wednesday."

"I should like to read the letter," observed Mr. Penrose, patiently. She handed it to him without further remark, and he got up and went

to the window with it. The winter day was dying gorgeously upon a windy sky. The cow-pasture that belonged to the parsonage gave a shivering perspective behind the barn and the woodshed. There was a well-sweep, too, and there was a hen-coop. All were covered with snow of the blue tint that one sees at the hour before twilight in the month preceding spring. From that side of the house no neighbor could be seen. Not a window glimmer dipped into the advancing dusk, and of course of street lights there were none. Beyond the pasture a scanty row of oaks stood gaunt against the fire of the west. The desolate scenery seemed to watch the minister while he read the letter.

It began affectionately: My dear Father, and how was poor Mother? and how was old Enoch? and so on. As the father turned the leaf to the second page there dropped from the sheet a slip of paper closely written with figures. He crushed it in his hand while he finished the letter — the poor, flimsy fold of words, as thin as black gauze, and as dreary. Excuse played with excuse, and ingenuity wheedled reason. In his honest soul the minister perceived of the letter that it was as cold as it was weak. But he did not say so to the lad's mother.

"Light the candle," she suggested. "It 's too dark for figures. You 'll hurt your eyes."

Mr. Penrose lighted the tallow candle in the tin candlestick on the bureau, still without speaking; he used a paper lamplighter to save matches. The invalid twisted the lamplighters. She was not helpless, and could move about the room in her easier hours. Still with his back to his wife, the minister glanced at the paper which held the boyish subterfuges known as his son's "accounts." One look sufficed the father.

"I can attend to this better in the study," he said abruptly.

He stooped again at the low door, and crossed the dark entry quickly. His study was a small room, barren of everything but books, and these, alas! of a scanty force for a thinking, preaching man. There was sun in the study mornings, but by now it was half-past four o'clock, and gray as gloom. He sat down in the dull place and lighted his kerosene lamp slowly. He was aware of being in no haste to see the lad's accounts; but after a pause he faced them bravely.

They ran somewhat after the fashion of many a better boy than Harry Penrose — anything, anyhow, to placate a father, old and poor. Tuition, board, room, society dues, clothes, car fares — these were paraded at their full-dress force. Other items were elided or absorbed shrewdly. One preposterous sum was entered as "Charity." At the close of the list stood the naïve dénouement: "*Sundries*, — $60."

The minister laid the paper down and stared into the glimmer of his open base-burner. That air of cheerful unconcern which he had worn in the presence of his wife had now dropped from his face like a paper mask worn at some cheap game. He looked what he was — an elderly man, sensitively honorable, not physically strong, and sinking under the struggle to support his family. It was a heavier family to lift, as he reflected, than it would have been, or need have been. If Sarah had been well — but poor Sarah! If the boy had been more considerate — but poor Harry! The sum, in fact, was out of all reason; it was, if you chose to call it so, out of all humanity.

The paper containing the lad's accounts had crackled from his father's knee, and fell over towards the fire, wafting with a little swirl of air, as a gust from the winter evening rattled the loose windows of the study. Mr. Penrose could not afford double windows, and he was accustomed to stuff the casings with listing; in extreme weather he hung up an old comforter between himself and the biting draught; screens were too expensive. As he stooped and snatched the bit of paper to save it from cremation, he perceived for the first time that there was writing upon the outside of it — dim, because it was done with pencil. He returned to the kerosene lamp with the paper, and read the pencilled words: —

"Dear Father, I 'm sorry, but this is n't the worst of it. I 'm darned hard up. You see, I 've got into debt. I borrowed of somebody who won't wait. I 've got to pay up next Saturday. Take it altogether it comes to —"

In the shaking hand of his dear father the college boy's accounts blurred and darkened till they went dead black. Taken altogether, the lad had flung upon the parsonage an unexpected bill of more than three hundred dollars.

A bitterness bit into the minister's face — it was one of the faces for which we have no finer adjective than Christian, and this expression was therefore rudely foreign to it. After some unhappy thought he turned to his old desk and began to fumble there. In the lowest drawer was a false bottom, a bit of amateur carpentry, turning on a pivot to the hand that knew it. This piece of secular sophistry was, in fact, the parsonage safe; ingenuously supposed to be inaccessible to because unthinkable by an inconceivable burglar. The pastor's salary was so small that he did not carry a bank account. When he had closed the secret drawer he sat down wearily to write a letter. He had not finished before an unanswered knock admitted Fleecy Ann.

"Enoch 's be'n on a bat," she announced, querulously. "He 's just got home and he 's

messin' up my kitchen. Don't you want him in here?"

Without waiting for permission, a clumsy, old-fashioned St. Bernard pushed past Fleecy Ann, and waggled comfortably to his master's feet. Enoch was a very old dog; he and the lad had been puppies together, and Harry, it is needless to say, had been responsible for the naming of him. Enoch had always been a trial to the minister, who felt that the dog's name verged upon the sacrilegious. Matthew or Luke, Moses, or even Abraham, might have been pardonable. But the holy Enoch!

Enoch stood dripping by the base-burner; the frozen mud was melting from his tangled coat, but the dog did not avail himself of a dog's paradise — firelight and a rug. It was apparent to him, perhaps before it was to the man himself, that the minister was going out. If masters cannot rest and stay warm, why should a dog? When Mr. Penrose put on his hat and got himself into his thin gloves and worn overcoat, Enoch pushed open the door and awaited orders with dignity. None came, but their absence did not deter the shivering St. Bernard, who followed the thin, clerical figure out.

The black-clad man and the black dog looked in the twilight like the carving on a medallion selected from a series the continuity of which

was lost. They did not seem to relate, only to connect. Mr. Penrose was not a dog-lover, and unquestionably Enoch knew that; yet each did his duty by the other conscientiously, as befitted a religious family.

With his hand on the front-door knob Mr. Penrose hesitated; then returning, he went through the kitchen to the back door. Fleecy Ann was making milk-toast — a pious dish, which the ultimate of Christian consecration had never succeeded in teaching the pastor to accept with anything more cheerful than resignation.

"If Mrs. Penrose inquires," observed the minister, "you will tell her that I found it necessary to go to the post office before the hours close. I may be a little late to supper."

The post office was a long half-mile from the parsonage; this was, as Mrs. Penrose would have said, "just like Thistleton." Thistleton was a small parish, wind-smitten and orthodox; it knew few comforts, no luxuries, and the superlative force of the New England climate. "Anywhere outside of New England," Harry Penrose used to say, "this windy hole would have been called Thistledown."

The minister walked rapidly to the post office, that he might get there before the money-order hours closed. His coat was yet damp from his fall, and the wind, which was increasing, stabbed

him through the more viciously, he began to notice, on that side. The wet dog followed the wet man laboriously. When Mr. Penrose slipped his inclosure into the envelope he glanced over the note which he had written at home: —

My dear Harry, — Your letter gives me great concern, but I cannot reply to it at length to-night. It has been three days delayed by an accident in reaching me. I am hurrying to the office to mail a money-order to you at once. I inclose a draft for one hundred and twenty-five dollars. My son, with the exception of a small amount for daily demands, this is all the money I have in the house; it is all I have in the world, until my salary is due. But I cannot find it easy to bear that I should have a son in debt. I hope they are all *necessary* obligations? Of course you realize that our income is narrow, and that, owing to your mother's illness, we cannot reduce our household expenses much below the point which they have already reached. If I had only myself to consider, we might do so. Do not think me harsh if I say that I must beg you to be as considerate and economical as you can. And believe that I am, always,

Your loving father,

Eliakim Penrose.

On the way home — the minister and the St. Bernard trudging along silently in the winter of the darkening night — a plumber's wagon overtook the two and offered them a ride. One should rather say The Plumber, since Thistleton knew but one. His name was Ledd — Aaron Ledd. Although a plumber, Aaron Ledd was a deacon, and held his pastor in the historic subjection recorded of pastors and their ecclesiastical officers.

"I brought your letter," observed Mr. Ledd. "I thought I would help you out. It was some late, but I don't suppose that made any partikkelar difference, did it? What 's that follerin' along behind? Looks like a mounting-bear. There was one round last week."

The plumber whipped up.

"Excuse me," pleaded the minister. "I 'm sorry to trouble you, Deacon, but that is my son's dog. He 's pretty old. And he has rheumatism. Would you mind his coming in the wagon?"

"He can set on the pipes if he wants to," replied the deacon, without enthusiasm. But Enoch was too old and too lame to jump, and Mr. Penrose clambered down stiffly and lifted up the heavy dog. This hurt his damp side a little, but he did not mention that. He did not really love Enoch very much; but he never neglected any living thing.

"Harry doin' well?" demanded the plumber deacon, authoritatively. Between his smarting sensibility and the utter truth, the father hesitated long enough for a register and a parlor grate to tumble over on Enoch; who, not being a hired minister, lifted up his voice and swore at the deacon.

"My son is a dear boy," replied the pastor, with a touch of the gentle dignity which even the chairmen of church committees have been known to respect.

When he got home it did not occur to Mr. Penrose to change his damp coat. Fleecy Ann made him a cup of weak tea and brought him his milk-toast; this he ate by the base-burner in the study; but Enoch begged away a good deal of his supper.

"The dog is old, and weak, and cold," he thought.

"Mis' Penrose has gone to sleep," observed Fleecy Ann. "I fed her half an hour ago. I 've fed the hens, too. There ain't nothin' left now but you. Better not wake her up. She cried a spell after you was gone."

The husband sighed with relief. He had wondered all the way home what he should say to Sarah about the money-order. She was not easy to deceive; few invalids are; and when anything concerned Harry, she had an abnormal insight

— a cross between that of a crippled seer and a mother-turkey.

This was on a Thursday evening. Friday afternoon's mail brought another college letter; and this one Mr. Penrose resolutely repressed from the knowledge of his wife. He had waked with a little cold that day, and it was snowing some, but he walked to the post office again — feeling for some reason uneasy — and Enoch followed him.

He did not read the letter till he got back; half the parish was in the post office. And he turned the key of his study door to do so. Enoch stood anxiously watching him open the letter, which the St. Bernard had nosed shrewdly. In the dog's eyes was a startling intelligence. After all, who knew Harry Penrose better than Enoch?

The letter was scrawly and cloudy — blotted, too; Harry was usually a neat writer.

"My dear Father and Mother," wrote the college boy, "I have not got an answer to my last, and my need of money is urgent, for several reasons. One of these I did not explain when I wrote. It is — I mean — you see, in fact, I am not very well. I have doctor's bills to meet. I've seen a man in town who stands well — Jackson; Dr. Hiram Jackson. He says there 's some trouble with my lungs. Don't worry, for I 'll

come out all right, but just now I seem to need some attention. I am

Your affectionate son,

HARRY.

"P.S. — Give my love to Enoch and Fleecy Ann.

"P.P.S. — I have invented an automobile brake. I wish I could afford to get a patent on it. They tell me it 's great. They say —" The postscript trailed off into a splash of ink.

"Well, what is it now?" demanded Mrs. Penrose. Her husband did not take the bony armchair beside her, but stood with his back to the air-tight stove, warming his hands.

"You 're coughing again," proceeded the wife, without waiting for an answer. "Where 's your syrup?"

"I gave the last of it to Enoch," observed the minister, guiltily. "He was so hoarse. Where is Fleecy Ann, my dear? It is time for family prayers. I will call her."

Fleecy Ann came wiping her hands on her cooking-apron, which it did not occur to her to remove. She took a chair by the door. Enoch came in and lay behind the air-tight stove. The minister sat by his wife's sofa, and read from the Bible — not much, only a few verses. He chose the prayer of the Crucified for His disciples —

that supreme outcry of tenderness for the dearest and the most dependent which entreated "that none of these whom Thou hast given me may be lost."

Then Eliakim Penrose prayed — very briefly that night, and not discursively as he sometimes did. He did not put in any petition for foreign missions. He omitted to draw the attention of Heaven to the church and Sunday-school; in fact, he neglected the parish altogether. In a few thrilling words he prayed for his own.

"Lord," he said, "remember us, for we need to be thought of. Keep us from mistakes. Spare us fresh trouble. Let us not be smitten more than we can bear. Teach us how to act when we are perplexed. Show us the right thing, the wise thing to do. Be merciful to this household; to its handmaiden upon whom we all depend; to the sufferer in this sick-room whom we long to shield from every pang; to the absent son — our only child. Give him health of body and integrity of character. Grant that he may long be spared to us —" The minister's praying voice faltered, and the father rose from his knees. Enoch came up anxiously and kissed his hand. Fleecy Ann stared, and went out to finish her dishes.

"Oh, what *is* it?" cried the wife.

Mr. Penrose stood by the air-tight, coughing.

He did not speak at once. When he did, he only said: —

"I am going to Harle."

"*Oh!* To see Harry?"

"To see Harry."

"Why don't you tell me what it is?"

"He is not — that is, not very well," replied the minister, slowly.

"What do you mean? You might as well say it as pray it. Soul or body?"

"Both, perhaps."

"He 's wet his feet," observed the mother. "Or he is n't wearing his flannels. Probably he is n't saying his prayers. Are n't you going to show me the letter?"

"*No,*" came the answer, in a tone which the indulged invalid did not often hear. When she did, she knew better than to parley with it.

"Very well," she said; but she turned her face to the back of the sofa, and the slow tears of age and long endurance crawled down her wrinkled cheeks.

"When I get back," suggested Mr. Penrose, more cheerfully, "I will tell you everything — that is, all it is worth while to talk about. We must not make too much of things. We must do the best we can. We must be patient and trust in God."

"I have n't done a thing *but* be patient and

trust in God since I can remember," returned the more secular wife. "I get tired out with it, Mr. Penrose. When you going to start?" she added briskly. "I must have your flannels aired. You 'll need all your stockings darned, too. Going to-morrow?"

"It is too late to fill the pulpit now," replied the minister. "There 's nobody I know of round here to give a Sunday, and you see for yourself, Sarah, I can't afford a supply. I must preach twice — and then there 's the Bible class. I shall take the first train Monday morning."

"You cough too hard to preach," urged Mrs. Penrose. "Are you *sure* I can't see Harry's letter?"

"Leave it to me, won't you, Mother? Trust me, can't you, for a day or two?"

"I 'd rather trust you than the Lord," replied the minister's wife, profanely. "But you see I 'm his mother."

In the descent of the winter afternoon an elderly traveller stepped from the northern train into the university town, which he had not visited for so long that he passed for a stranger to it and to its traditions. He was proud to the last drop of scholastic blood in him to be a Harle graduate; but he had reached that point in his biography where a man begins to be known as

"an old graduate." He was not yet an old man, being, in fact, scarcely sixty, but either the hardship or the rusticity of his life, or both, had aged him beyond his years. He would have been a person of fine presence, had he lacked a certain air natural to a country life and limited income. His height was marked, his eyes were commanding, and his mouth unusually fine. He was so poorly clad as to be noticeable in the crowd of well-dressed youths and prosperous professors through which he made his way with pathetic diffidence. He was coughing, and the air was savagely raw; but it did not occur to him to call a cab; in fact, he had calculated the expense of his trip to the last penny; he had not money to pay for a supper. In his old-fashioned hand-bag he carried cold luncheons enough, put up at home, to last him through; or so he had planned. His bag was heavier than it need have been — his wife had packed in a set of extra flannels for their son, and a change of shoes for himself. He walked slowly, and swung the bag from hand to hand when it tired him. When he had walked rather aimlessly for a block or two he went into a druggist's and asked for a directory. There was a smell of hot beef-tea and malted milk in the drug-store; he was conscious of being faint, and hesitated, but he knew that he had not ten cents to spare, and took himself abruptly away.

"It must go for car fares," he thought. While he stood waiting for an up-town electric, a red touring-car skidded by and spattered him with freezing mud. The car was filled with college boys, and was speeding carelessly. The boys were singing and jeering. One of them, a tall fellow in furs and goggles, laughed resoundingly as the machine passed the old clergyman. There was something in the lad's laugh — what was it? *Who* was it? He on the sidewalk stood with the blood pounding at his heart. But the visor and the goggles forbade him.

"A man could not recognize his own flesh and blood in that toggery," thought the country parson. "Nothing were easier than to be mistaken. Of course, it would be impossible — with his lungs. His doctor would not allow it."

The introduction of the doctor's name into his thoughts hurried him, and he walked back nervously to anticipate the next car. It used to be a blue horse-car, but everything in Harle had changed to something else. Now, a blazing red electric flung its search-light in his face. The old graduate was confused by the new university world. His head spun and his eyes blurred. He was pretty cold, too; and faint, as we have said. He lost a car, and considerable time with it. He found it necessary to cling carefully to the railing when he climbed to the platform of the car;

and to cling more cautiously when he left it; for the steps were slippery. He was glad that his wife had made him wear his rubbers.

The doctor's steps were slippery, too, and a haughty negro was putting sawdust on them. He glanced at the country minister with the superciliousness which only the cultivated poor can feel, and yet scorn themselves for feeling, in the manner of servants. The rustic, ill-dressed man was ushered curtly into the office. For a moment the sudden warmth of the room caught the breath of the shivering visitor; and his head fell against the tall, carved back of the office chair.

"You are faint," observed the doctor. The Reverend Mr. Penrose found brandy at his lips, but he pushed it gently away.

"Excuse me, sir," he pleaded. "I am the president of the Temperance Society in my parish."

He felt as he spoke them how the words would sound to this man of the world of the flesh. But he was not accustomed to apologize for his convictions. An expression of enforced respect traversed the face of the other.

"Ah, then," he said gently. "A few swallows of tea." He rang, and the haughty negro brought a cup of tea. It was served upon a silver tray, in a delicate china cup from some famous factory

of which the country minister had never heard. He drank gratefully, and when he had finished the tea he put his story into as few words as possible, and awaited the verdict as quietly as he could. But the physician did not speak. He was a fashionable college doctor, but he was a young doctor; his heart had not hardened within him yet; he regarded the clerical figure in the patient's chair with an expression in which pity and deference manifestly fought.

"You see," entreated the Reverend Mr. Penrose: "his mother is an invalid — I cannot say what effect this will have upon her. But I cannot keep such news from her very long. I thought it best to come directly to you for the facts. I am prepared for the worst."

"I doubt if you are," sprang to the physician's lips; but he switched the sentence off — "I mean, I doubt if you have come to the right office. I have not made any tubercular diagnosis in the case of your son."

The father began to tremble.

"Are you not Doctor Jackson?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Hiram Jackson?"

"That is my name."

"Do you not know my son — Harry Penrose — a Junior — on the football team? A tall young man? His hair curls. He is an athletic fellow.

That was why this news surprised me so. Surely you must know my son, sir?"

"Oh yes," admitted the college doctor. "I have met your son. But it is some time — I think he sent for me for a sprained ankle. It must have been six months ago."

"Then you have not said —"

"I have *not*," replied the doctor, in a reverberating voice. "There is, I repeat, an evident error. You must have mistaken the name of your son's physician, Mr. Penrose. I hope, when you find him, he will be able to relieve your apprehension altogether. These college lads give their parents a good many scares; they are seldom as ill as they think."

The eyes of the minister evaded those of the physician, while the other chatted on kindly — anyhow, anything, to save the dreadful moment.

"It is plain that I *have* made a mistake," said Mr. Penrose, steadily. "I have — perhaps I have — come to the wrong office. I thank you, sir. You are — you have been considerate. I am much obliged to you."

He pushed himself weakly into his thin overcoat. The doctor helped him gently while he said: "You 'd better look after that cough, Mr. Penrose. If I were you, I 'd get home as soon as possible."

He handed the minister his old silk hat, and

himself showed the visitor kindly to the door. Mr. Penrose was conscious of a foolish gratitude that the negro was not to be seen.

He went blindly down the sawdusted steps. A college car was passing, and he took it. At the campus he got out and made his way slowly to his son's rooms. It seemed to him undesirable to hurry. The old dormitory that he used to study and freeze in was gone. They called them halls now; they were handsome buildings, warm and luxurious. The chapel was left, and the library, yet untouched; these had the dignity of their age and austerity upon them; there was ivy on the chapel still. There were no study hours now, and boys were rollicking everywhere. He was obliged to push his way through a crowd that did not yield for him, and he mounted the stairs — there were two flights — with a weariness equalled only by his reluctance. He shrank so from what was before him that he was tempted to return to his wife, and Fleecy Ann, and Enoch, without revealing himself. But he climbed on, and knocked at his son's door. There was no reply to the summons, and he stood uncertain.

"Harry should be studying," he thought. "Probably he is." While he hesitated, a loud boy's laugh assailed his ears — and another and another; a storm of what he would have called

"revelry" broke through the room of the student. Mr. Penrose knocked again, but his tap was unheard, and he gently pushed open the door, and stood, unnoticed.

That the room was handsomely fitted did not much surprise him; he remembered that Harry's chum had a rich father. Draperies, lion-skins, a damask couch-cover, bric-â-brac, pictures, college flags, luxurious easy-chairs, swam before his eyes muddily. A fur automobile-coat was tossed over the back of the chair in which Harry was sitting. Automobile goggles and gauntlets were thrown upon a foot-rest. There were three other lads. The table was littered with poker chips. A bottle and glasses stood at his son's elbow. Perplexing details arrested the eyes of the minister, who had never watched a gambling game in his life. In fact, he did not know poker from bridge, nor madeira from champagne.

Harry was playing cleverly — he could see that. The boy's face was of a higher order than any to which his companions belonged, and the father, with a snap at the heart, saw that too. Harry was a handsome lad — curly, with frolicsome eyes; he was broad of shoulder and full of chest. He looked to be in excellent health. A curious, darting look roved across his eyes, in and out, and in again — his uncle Harry used to

have that expression. His father watched it with held breath. The knob of the door curled into one's hand, and he clung to it; he had not stirred.

"I call," said one of the boys, shoving a yellow chip into the middle of the table and scowling at Harry. Another dropped a blue, and stooped with an oath to pick it up. This brought the minister within range of his eyes.

"Look here, Penrose," he said. "Who 's that old codger in the door?"

Harry Penrose turned. A color as deep as the grain of the red oak in the parsonage pasture surged to the boy's ears; then he went snow white. Instinctively his hand covered the pile of chips nearest him upon the table, while he cried: "Why, Father!" It seemed he could think of nothing else to say, and he repeated the two words stupidly, "Why, Father!"

"Boys," he added, with difficulty, "my father has come to see me. We 'll stop for to-night."

The boys got to their feet and stood awkwardly. The country minister in his shabby clothes, with his Christian eyes, regarded them steadfastly. The man was now as much at home as he was in his own pulpit. The ethical situation had restored his self-possession. All his diffidence and rusticity had dropped from him. Harry was introducing his friends — uncom-

fortably, it could be seen; *he* was the rustic now; he stammered and quavered. The Reverend Mr. Penrose responded with a certain courtliness. The boys found their hats and slunk out. One of them was something the worse for liquor, and his friends helped him along. When the door had closed behind them all, Harry turned the key.

"Won't you come and get warm, Father?" he said timidly. "You look cold."

Mr. Penrose took the chair that was pushed towards him, and put his numbed feet upon the radiator. Harry put away the bottle and glasses, pushed away the chips, and threw his cigar out of the window.

Neither the man nor the boy spoke. The room was nauseating and blue with smoke. The minister sickened in it, but he did not say so. He had never nagged Harry about smoking. He had perceived that there were more serious matters concerning which to contend with a son for the life of his soul.

"Had your supper, Father?" asked the lad, when he had borne the surcharged silence as long as he could.

Mr. Penrose shook his head.

"Oh, come on, then, with me. Come over to my club. It is n't late. You look as if you needed something."

"Your mother directed Fleecy Ann to put me up some luncheons," replied the minister, unexpectedly. "It saves buying them. But I have not felt like eating — not to-night. If you will excuse me, Harry, I will take a bite right here. I might feel stronger for it. I do not — I am not as well as usual."

He drew out from his old bag a big paper parcel of corned-beef sandwiches and caraway cookies, and tried conscientiously to eat. After a few mouthfuls he gave up the attempt, and restored the luncheon to the bag. He scrupulously picked up the crumbs, and was stooping to brush them from the rug with his hand, when Harry gulped and rushed:—

"For God's sake, Father — *don't.* That 's for *me*, not you." The boy knelt and brushed the crumbs, and then he lifted his hanging face.

"Why, you 've got your overcoat on yet, Father. You 'll take cold when you go out. You *have* a cold. Where did you get that cough?"

The lad could be seen to cringe as he removed the shabby overcoat from his father's shoulders. He laid it down across the automobile fur, as if, perhaps, he would have covered that from sight. He shut the window and turned on more heat in the radiator. By this time he had in some measure regained his composure. He was puzzled that his father did not blame him; he would have

preferred to be blamed; he felt as if a good, round, unsanctified scolding would have been a relief. He even wished that his father had been a swearing man and would hurl language at him. He was perfectly aware that there was nothing in the compass of the profane vocabulary which he did not deserve. At last the minister spoke.

"Your mother sends you her love," he said gently. "And so would Enoch, I am sure, if he could speak English. You are greatly beloved at home, my son. We miss you very much. . . . I thought it best to come on and see for myself how you are situated. . . . I have done so," he added, with a poignant glance about the dissipated-looking room. "It does not seem to be a case for words," he proceeded slowly. "But, there are two points. Your bills —"

"I 've taken out a caveat on that automobile brake," interrupted the lad. "They think I could get a patent. That 's expensive, you see."

"I know that 's only a part of it," added Harry, feverishly. His shallow words flooded his father's significant silence.

"I 'm in a deuce of a scrape, Father," he pleaded. There was a childish movement of his handsome mouth; he put up his under lip in the way he used to do when he was a baby.

"I can mortgage your grandfather's homestead in Vermont," said Mr. Penrose, without

looking at the lad. "I can sell it, if necessary. I have no other assets — none in the world."

"But you rent it summers. It helps you out. Your salary is so small!" cried the boy. "You can't afford to do that."

"I can afford it better than I can afford to have my son in debt," replied the minister.

"Some of them are debts of honor," urged Harry, weakly.

"There we differ," contradicted Mr. Penrose, with the first grip of sternness that had clutched through the interview. "Call them debts of dishonor — debts of dishonor! Then drop the matter. There is one other. Your health — You understood, of course, how much suffering your last letter would cause. I have not shown it to your poor mother. I did not dare to. So I came on. I have been to see your doctor, Harry."

But Harry's curling head had fallen into his athletic hands; his father's commanding, quiet voice rose about him like a tide. "Doctor Jackson? Dr. Hiram Jackson? That was the name, was it? Perhaps I made a mistake? I hoped there was some mistake — I have not your letter by me. If there is some other physician, Harry — " The words climbed to a pathetic eagerness.

"No!" cried Harry, lifting his abject face. "There is n't any other. I suppose he was the

only one I could think of. I guess I told you a cursed lie — I was so hard up!"

"I don't know but I 'd rather it *had* been true," groaned the father, "than — than *this*."

He rose and stood blindly, groping for his hat; he had got his arms into the sleeves of his overcoat before the lad's mind overtook the meaning of the act.

"But, Father! You 're not *going?* Where will you go? Where are you staying? It 's too cold for you to go anywhere — with that cough. Take my room, Father! Stay with me, Father, do! I can turn in on the lounge — I shall be all right. My chum 's a good fellow. He won't mind. . . . *Father!*"

"Good-night, Harry. Good-by."

"Father, don't go! Stay here with me! *Father!*"

"Good-night, my son. Good-by, my son. Good-by."

"I will try to make you comfortable," entreated Harry.

The father lifted one hand in a singular, solemn gesture; it was not unlike that the lad had seen him use in the old church at Thistleton at the moment of the benediction. The college boy shrivelled before the gesture.

He stood stupidly, and then he ran. But his mind had not run, and Mr. Penrose had well the

start of him, having reached the lower flight of stairs. There were no fellows about, and Harry called after him tremulously: —

"Father! I was n't quite such a brute as you think! When I wrote that cursed letter I was — Father, I 'd been — Father, come back and stay with me! *Father!*"

Then Harry scrambled down and out into the air, still calling. But the fleeing figure did not hear. It melted into the campus with its pathos and its dignity — a ghost of the old, vanished Harle; the religious Harle, whose sons lived sparsely, and studied laboriously, and honored their parents; and their days were long in the land of the intellect and of the spirit.

The minister had now begun to feel very ill. A stranger in his Alma Mater, he wandered for a little while, aimlessly. He had no money for hotel bills. No train left for Thistleton till morning. It seemed to him that, though he spent the night in the streets, he could not accept the hospitality of his own son. It had been upon his lips to say so to the boy, in a few leaping words — all human and all terrible. Now he was glad that he had not done so; and afterwards he thanked God that he had never spoken them. The blazing red electric with the search-light had almost run him down while he was wonder-

ing what he should do. He took the car, and the car took him to the station. Then he remembered the night express. It did not stop at Thistleton; but there was a crossing where it had to slow up, four miles beyond. It was warm in the Harle station. He tried to eat one of his corned-beef sandwiches while he waited for the train. When it came, he took it without hesitation. He breathed upon the frost on the car window presently to look out. He saw that it was beginning to snow.

Everybody was abed and asleep but Enoch. The old dog could not rest, but wandered unaccountably here and there. From the kitchen to the wood-shed, from the shed to the front porch, he beat a monotonous, uneasy track. Fleecy Ann had called him in, till she got tired of it, and abandoned him to his whim. It snowed hard, and the wind rose, but Enoch minded neither circumstance. Often he went to the street and looked up and down. Then he returned to the porch and lay flat in the drifting snow. He did not sleep.

"He 's expectin' of his marster," Fleecy Ann observed to Mrs. Penrose. "You 'll have to leave him be. I *told* him there war n't no train. But he thinks he knows better."

He had a bed of his own in the wood-shed, and

another in the kitchen, but Enoch did not go to bed. It snowed viciously, and it snowed all night. Towards dawn, at half-past four by the church clock, the dog's disturbance visibly increased. He ran to the street and lay down there, watching both ways. He could not see very well nor hear very well, — he was so old, — but that in him stronger than sight or hearing held him to his post. At quarter of five the dog began to whine and nose the snow, and toss it this side and that, and burrow in it. Now he waded over to the church — it was but a few rods — and whined and burrowed there. What was the mound against the steps — too dark to be a drift, too white to be a man? The dog with the blood of the snow and the mountains in him — he of the famous race whose passion it is to save the master race or perish in the effort — leaped and pushed and pounced, and kissed and clung, and warmed and kissed again. And while he kissed he cried like a human child.

The man was not unconscious, and he had wit enough left to rouse and move. He would have said that he had only stopped to rest; afterwards he maintained that he had called for help. But if he did, only the half-deaf dog heard him. Even the wife slept through.

The village doctor — the wheels of his buggy

clogged and thwarted by the heavy, unexpected snow — was driving slowly from a late case, when Enoch leaped out, and stood in the road before the tired horse, and barked hoarsely, with agonizing sound.

"What 's the matter, Enoch?" said the doctor. But he saw what was the matter, and sprang.

So the old St. Bernard — limping through the packed snow behind the buggy — brought his master home.

The minister turned and slept; when he had waked he turned and looked. It was his first unclouded look for now some weeks. He knew that he must have been very sick. But he had not troubled himself about that. It seemed that he had undergone acute hallucinations and distresses. In his delirium he called persistently for Harry. Sometimes he varied the word and cried, "My son, my son!"

They had made up a bed for him in his study, and therein he found himself, one burly March day, when the base-burner drew fast, and the comforter was hung between the rattling windows and the study chair. The Revised Version and the Concordance were closed. His "Bible Dictionary" and "Travels in the Holy Land" and the "Parabolic Teachings of Christ" had

been shoved away into the bookcases. Medicines and a red geranium and a box of guava jelly had replaced his sermon paper and the "International Lessons" upon his desk. He felt that Enoch was on the floor beside him; but for the moment there seemed to be no one else in the room. He experienced a species of relief that the gaunt red-oaks beyond the stark pasture could not be seen from this side of the house. He glanced at his church, and wondered who had supplied. He took a certain pleasure in hearing sleigh-bells call by; and he noticed that the hens were out enjoying themselves between the woodpile and the back door. These matters appeared to be as much as his mind could carry, and he sighed and slept again. When he waked, his wife was in the room, and he said: —

"Why, Sarah! Poor Sarah! What will this do to *you?*"

For he had been aware all along, although he could not say so, that the invalid — with the splendid power of chronic invalids to spring out of themselves into the precipice of emergencies that reach deeper than their own physical miseries — had been often in the study, silently beside him. She had a divine quiet and comprehension. Sarah used to be wonderful when people were sick — before she herself was smitten.

"You 're all right, Mr. Penrose," she said serenely. "You are growing better every minute."

"Did you have Miss Whatcher here?" he asked unexpectedly. Miss Whatcher was the village nurse; of the oldest and dreariest variety known to the hill-country towns. Thistleton had never evolved beyond Miss Whatcher. Mrs. Penrose nodded.

"Where has the old maid gone to?" demanded the sick man, irritably. This was as near profanity as the Reverend Mr. Penrose had ever been known to arrive. His wife's heavenly blue eyes scintillated with keen earthly appreciation of the moral lapse.

"She 's off duty to-day."

"Thank God!" he ejaculated. "Was n't there a man nurse, too?" he added, after some difficult thought. "Lately, I mean?"

"Yes," replied the wife, comfortably. "There's been one for a few days."

"Where is he?"

"I sent him upstairs to get some sleep."

"*You* go rest, Sarah," pleaded the patient, with his old unresting thoughtfulness for her. A tenderer husband never lived.

"Very well," said Sarah. "Just as you say. I'll send Fleecy Ann in a while."

Beside the bed the dog lay like a statue of

Barry, his ancestor — the great Barry, on whose monument are carved these words: —

"*He saved forty persons; he was killed by the forty-first.*"

Only one member of the family could induce Enoch to leave the study. When the sick man's hand fell over the edge of the mattress, Enoch softly kissed it.

Fleecy Ann sat down by the base-burner importantly, as if she had been playing a part in a charade or tableau at some church festival. Her hands were folded on her cooking-apron. She did not speak. The hens clucked drowsily by the wood-pile. The sleigh-bells did not disturb the patient, who seemed to take a pleasure in them. Like an animal who lives by continual naps, he turned and slept again.

The blue snow of the March hour before twilight had darkened into purple gray, when the man nurse came in. The doctor had been and gone, and the minister was lying peacefully. The man nurse brought in a cup of chicken broth. Except for the stove-light the room was dark. Mr. Penrose took the broth obediently. He had begun to tremble, but he spoke quietly enough; he perceived that he was too weak to agitate himself.

"How long have you been here, Harry? I did not expect to see *you*."

"I've sent that old hen off," replied Harry, irreverently. He strode over Enoch, and sat down by the bed as if nothing had happened. "I'm perfectly able to take care of you," the lad affirmed, with some emphasis. "I am very strong and well. I'm worth a dozen hens, anyhow. . . . *Let* me take care of you, Father! *Please!*"

He remained on duty all night. The boy's big hands, gnarled with baseball, toughened by football, supple from brassies and drivers, and steeled with steering automobiles, handled the wraith of the sick man with a wonderful velvet. He seemed to need neither sleep nor respite. He sat like a figure of a gladiator; he observed like an educated man; he touched like a woman. Once in the night his father thought he heard him sob like one.

There were no words between them on any matter, and morning found them together and silent — it was a beautiful morning. Harry went to his breakfast and his bed.

"You won't miss me, Father, will you," he asked anxiously, "if I sleep a little?"

"I shall be glad to see you when you are rested, my son," replied Mr. Penrose, with reserve. But the boy saw a single tear upon the man's gray-white cheek. Impulsively he stooped and put his lips to his father's shrunken hand. Then the door closed quickly and quietly between them.

It went on in this way with them for some days and nights; but the patient obviously gained upon himself, and grew something stronger. One cloudy day he seemed to be oppressed and troubled, and when the lad had come on duty in the late afternoon, he spoke outright:—

"Harry, you must be getting back. It won't do to stay away from Harle too long. You'll fall behind your rank. You'd better send for Miss Whatcher. I can get along."

Then Harry Penrose gathered himself — he used to say afterwards that it took more grit than it did to hold a ball with a dozen fellows atop of you — he took his heart in his young mouth and distinctly said:—

"Father, don't worry. I am not going back to college." A breath such as might answer the stab of an instrument that turned in a wound escaped the sick man.

"Suspended?" he gasped.

"No, sir."

"Are you expelled, Harry?"

"*No*, sir!"

"I don't understand, then. Explain yourself, my son."

"I have left college, sir. I am going into business. I have found an excellent situation. I am going to pay my own debts — every fool dollar of them, that 's all. I've arranged the whole

matter. I won't have you carry the load of me another month. I've done with it. I've made an ass of myself long enough."

"Business?" repeated the minister, vaguely. "What species of business?" He pictured his son in a retail dry-goods store measuring off cotton cloth with a yardstick; or possibly it might be blue ribbon.

"Automobiles," said Harry, promptly. "I'm going in with my chum's father. I'll begin at the bottom and pull up. You'll see, sir."

"But afterwards?" eagerly cried Mr. Penrose. "It is very commendable in you, Harry; but after your debts are paid — you could return and take your Senior year?"

"I never was born for it, Father," replied the boy — gently for a boy. "I shall be better off working dog-hard at something I can handle. You and Mother have stood too much from me. I've been a wild fellow — cruel, too. I'm so ashamed of myself — I'm *sick* ashamed. I never would have come home at all. I'd have run away. But when Mother wrote me — she put a special delivery on it, Father. Think of that!"

The boy tried to laugh, and then he tried not to choke. The Reverend Mr. Penrose was perfectly silent. For a moment his heart battled within the old Harle graduate. His son! The spiritual heir of seven generations of ministers!

Automobiles! For the first time in his life he reflected that there might be other values in a man's career than a college diploma. Call it what you will — soul — spirit — character — temperament — Harry had to be made or marred in his own way — or God's. Was it possible that an automobile brake could be God's way?

"You must decide for yourself, my son," he faltered. When he turned his agitated face he saw that the boy was kneeling beside the bed, and fighting back big sobs as he used to do when he was a little, manly fellow, and had got thrashed in a fight.

"Father, you did n't hear me that night — I called after you to say — Father, I was n't such an infernal scoundrel — I'd been drinking when I wrote that confounded letter. It's been bad enough, Lord knows. Forgive me, Father! My poor father! If the God you preach is the God you practise . . . if He 's like *you* — Father! I'd believe — why, I'd believe in *anything!*"

But there the boy hid his face upon one of the minister's shaking hands. Slowly, in a sacred stillness, he felt the other creep up and rest upon his curly head.

Then elastic, radiant, boy-like, he rebounded.

"Father! I've sold that automobile coat. I could n't wear the blamed thing again — I'd

freeze first. It's going into — it means something for you — you'll hear from it. Where's Enoch? Come on, Enoch! Let's go snowball by the wood-pile where Father can see!"

It came on to be the last evening of the lad at home, and the convalescent minister had begged to be allowed a certain privilege for now many weeks denied him.

"I should like to hold family prayers, my son, in your mother's room, according to our custom, before you go."

So Harry gave him an iron arm, and had helped him across the dark entry and stooped him under the low door, when Enoch's bronchial bark, thundering upon a disturbance in the back yard, scattered the religious emotions of the family too thoroughly for immediate recall.

"I'll go and see," observed Harry, with some embarrassment.

"It's The Plumber!" said Fleecy Ann, with awe. History did not record when a plumber (in his professional capacity) had been seen at the Thistleton parsonage.

Whip in hand, rubber boots to his knees, fur cap on the back of his head, Deacon Ledd tramped muddily through the kitchen, and stood before the too low door in the front entry by the wood-box. At that point he removed his cap and

took the attitude which he assumed when he spoke in prayer-meeting on Friday evenings.

"Mr. Penrose," he said, not without signs of excitement, "when do you think, sir, you'd be able to let us put a furnace int' the parsonage?"

The pastor went ashen to the lips.

"Does the parish wish me to resign?" he panted. "Have you appointed a successor? — I know I've been ill a good while. But I thought I should be able to preach Sunday after next, Deacon Ledd."

Harry Penrose took three steps. One big, unregenerate word leaped to his lips before the very ears of the church officer.

"*Damn!*" said Harry. He went up and put his young arm around his father. "Oh, hurry up, Deacon!" he cried irreverently.

"Pastor," complained the plumber deacon, "I would n't have thought it of you, sir. *Me!* — *us* — your *people!* Why, pastor, there ain't a parson in North America we'd swop you for. . . . This — this dog-goned furnace is yours, sir, *yours!* Here, Harry, you'll have to finish this speech yourself. It's too much for me. I can't do it in a suitable manner. Won't, hey? Sho! Well, then, I've set you all of a tremble, sir — Sho! Mr. Penrose, if he won't, then here goes. It's *him* did it, not us. I wish'd we had. But we never thought on't. . . . Harry, he's put part down,

pastor, and I've taken a mortgage on his wages till he's paid whole up. He was partikkelar on that point. There ain't goin' to be any liabilities on this furnace, Mr. Penrose. Nor we don't calculate to have any more pneumonias in this parsonage — not if good hot air and Lehigh Valley can pervent it, sir."

Hands in his pockets, Harry had stood whistling softly. Now he interrupted: —

"Father, Deacon Ledd doesn't say that he is giving all the work. He sets it up without charge. He has been very generous."

"The Ladies' Aid contributed the registers," interposed the Deacon, happily. "The Sunday-school ordered a ton of coal. And the Widows' Mite — they give the dampers. Your father don't seem to understand, Harry," added the ecclesiastical plumber, "how much this parish sets by him. It's goin' on twenty-two years — a good while, pastor. You've married us, an' you've baptized us, an' you've buried us, an' you've comforted us — "

"Deacon Ledd," said the Reverend Mr. Penrose, not very audibly, "we were about to meet for family prayers when you arrived upon your generous errand. Won't you stay and join us in our devotions? It is the first time since my recent illness, and the occasion is one of special interest to us, as you will perceive."

"I've got my rubber boots on," replied the Deacon. "And my mare ain't blanketed. If it's all the same to you, pastor, I guess I'll go out and unload. You pray and I'll work, pastor. See?"

The family, in the invalid's bedroom, sat quietly. Harry had turned the key. Mrs. Penrose cried some, as ministers' wives do when the parish has done a pleasant thing, and Fleecy Ann put her cooking-apron to her eyes. Enoch went behind the air-tight, coughing, and then he came over and crawled to his young master's feet. A minister may preach, but he cannot lie down on the floor and kiss a tan shoe a good while, and be very happy. Harry sat beside his mother's lounge with the comforter on it, and the old afghan. Through the window the oak trees looked in across the skylit pasture. The sun was dipping, and there was a joyous color everywhere.

The minister took his Bible and read a little from the vigorous great psalm which blesses the Lord in every verse, because His mercy endureth forever. Then he knelt and tried to pray. He had meant to pray quite a time; he felt as if he must remember the parish, and Deacon Ledd, and the Ladies' Aid, and the Sunday-school, and the Widows' Mite. Then he had thought that he

should ask the blessing of God upon his son — as he had never asked before, as he never might again. But he was surprised to find that all his glad words and all his solemn ones went from him as if they had wings — angel's wings, perhaps; who knew?

For these were all that he could speak:—

"Our Father who art in heaven! Like as a father pitieth his children . . . Thou hast pitied us . . . For the sake of Jesus Christ, Thine only Son, our Saviour . . ."

"*Amen,*" said Harry Penrose. The lad had gone upon his knees.

THE REJECTED MANUSCRIPT

The ten minutes past three train was due at Cantelope Corner. At Cantelope Corner the great P. and Q. Railroad Company is on time. The corporation looks upon punctuality as a duty to this fattening suburb; while the citizens thereof regard it as a sacred privilege which the corporation underestimates.

Cantelope Corner should not be confounded with Cantelope Heights, with Cantelope Cascade, or with Cantelope-on-the-Saint-Henry; least of all with Northwest Cantelope, the newest, and therefore the most pretentious, of all the Cantelopes. For Cantelope is old enough to aspire; it purposes to achieve distinction. In the broad sweep of all the beautiful, bountiful Boston suburbs, none cultivates such ambition. It has been whispered, indeed, that Cantelope aims at nothing less than the rivalry of the Newtons.

The Cantelope Corner grocer (there was but one, and he was so dangerous an autocrat that we hasten to speak of him respectfully) — the grocer's driver stood on the back-door steps of the Queen Anne house belonging to Mr. W. H. T. Wire, vaguely understood to be "in electri-

city." The grocer twirled between his finger and thumb a clean new pass-book. He delayed to offer to the cook some pleasantries, of the sort popular in Cantelope kitchens, before he made known his errand; for this was not his hour for taking orders from the imposing and imperious back door known in the arcana of trade as "We Hold-the-Wireses."

The grocer explained that he had come for the key of the house opposite, adding that his orders were twelve o'clock sharp, with a bag of flour and a few such. He mentioned incidentally that it was three now.

"Did n't they order a *barrel?*" asked the pretty cook, as she handed the new tenants' keys to the grocer. That gentleman contemptuously shook his head. If it had been a barrel, did she think he would be found "this late"?

"But I did hear at the coal-yard, on the way round, that the new folks are literary. That puts another face on it, Molly, my dear. Literary folks are darn hard up — Lord knows why, poor devils. But I never got a bad debt out of one of 'em yet."

"Shure, then," observed Molly, with an air of crushing intelligence, "the people opposite has wrote a book, for I see it on top shelf of the waste-paper cupboard in my lady's room."

"What was the name of it?" asked the grocer,

with some interest, as he slipped the keys upon the pass-book string. "Was it 'The Innocent Sin'? I've heard of that volume. It's very famous. If it's her that wrote 'The Innocent Sin,' I don't know but I'd better change the butter before they get here."

"Noa," said clever Molly, who was quite equal to the literary situation, "I heard my folks talkin' about that to the tea table. My lady says it is n't her at all at all. This one did n't write 'The Innocent Sin.' It's another woman of the same name."

"Then this butter will do," said the grocer, snapping the cover of the pass-book to. "I never heard of anything *she* wrote. She can't be of no importance. If she'd been the writer of 'The Innocent Sin' it would be another matter."

The grocer drove away to deposit his poor little order in the cold and empty house. With heavy indifference he left the pass-book behind him — the first occupant of the new home. It hung on a nail by the rusted sink, and fell conspicuously open at the page which bore the too legible legend, "Demosthenes Hathorne, to ——— ———, Debtor."

The name really was Demosthenes. No trick of fiction would dare invent such an improbability, and I hasten to verify the assertion. Nay, more; the unfortunate man was baptized Aris-

totle Demosthenes; but experience of life, chiefly in the form of two hundred school-boys, had elided a half of this portentous cognomen. Mr. Hathorne had been fain to reduce his too heavy personal share of the classic, at the end of the first year which he spent in guiding the fortunes of the famous Mount Zion Academy. Nobody but the principal and his wife knew what he had suffered from the infinite capacity for the infliction of torment residing in the nature of American youth. A teacher bearing the delicious fatality of such a name was foredoomed to failure at Mount Zion. Aristotle Demosthenes Hathorne, after enduring for four years the wittiest cartoons, paragraphs, caricatures, and serenades that had distinguished New England academy life in his day, resigned his first name and his position.

He had not been a very successful principal for other reasons, no one knew quite why; not even his trustees, who accepted his resignation without undue protest, and engaged a Reverend Mr. J. Smith to fill the vacancy with no perceptible delay.

The disappointed man, at the age of forty-two cast adrift to begin the world anew, tossed about Boston for a time in one of those wretched interludes of fate which professional people know too well, and which no others can understand. He

waited for invitations which did not come. He listened for "calls" which he never heard. He applied for positions which had engaged the other man the day before. He snatched at chances which slipped through his shaking fingers. He lay in wait for opportunities which turned and fled at the sight of his gaunt and anxious face. He was a shy man, and that did not help him. It used to be said at Mount Zion — after he resigned — that he was not quite up to the times in his methods of teaching. He had the physique of the sensitive and the conservative. He was a belated scholar, an old-time student without modern "go." He ought to have been the pastor of a colonial parish, or the scholastic of a mediæval controversy. He was lost in the New England scramble for a salary. He was a vellum volume out of print. He was a mistake in life's recitation. He was an anachronism.

There were two children, — and the wife, — and they had come to desperate straits. It was over a year since the salary stopped, and all her pretty expedients and brave inventions had come to an end with the little store which she had proudly saved from her own earnings for a day like this. In her heart she had always expected it some time. She had the practical sense of the two, although she did write poetry and love-stories; and when, one day, he had the

chance to take two Latin School boys to tutor at reduced rates, she gently persuaded him to do so. He went to his first lesson with hanging head, and a look about the mouth so piteous that she cried all the morning. But he went.

On the strength of this prospect, and of another which they did not talk much about, and by the immediate means of the very little legacy which fell to her from her father's desultory estate, they had rented this house in Cantelope Corner. Her father had been a literary man, too; he seldom saved, and often lost; he did not understand business; it did not run in the family to be rich.

They came on the ten minutes past three train, that November afternoon, as they had planned. They came alone. They had hired their boarding-house keeper to take the children for a couple of days, till the house could be warmed and put into habitable shape.

"We'll make the most of our freedom," she said to her husband, laughing nervously as tired-out women do. "It's quite like a honeymoon, is n't it?"

He glanced at the parcels that encumbered her; at the fat shawl-strap bundle (it held his winter overcoat and the children's) which she lugged along, while he carried the valise; at her faded gray "spring and fall" pongee dress; at

the much-mended fingers of her old kid gloves; at the portly and expensive pile of packing-boxes marked D. H., which the baggage-master was smashing about on the platform with running commentaries not of a sacred nature.

"Ye – es," said Demosthenes Hathorne. "Yes, my dear. Quite like it."

He felt at that moment as he had sometimes done on other occasions in his life, that he was deficient in imagination when compared with his wife.

"I'll stop at the post office," she said irrelevantly, "and you go up with the baggage, won't you? You are very tired. Here, dear. You get into the coach with the bundles. I'll see to everything."

He obeyed her mechanically; then recollected himself, and backed out of the muddy coach, knocking off his tall hat as he did so.

"*You* must ride," he urged contritely. "You must have — ah — become wearied yourself."

"He can go on the baggage-wagon," observed the driver of that vehicle, with an accent of good-natured patronage. "You do look beat out, both of you. Folks generally do that come here — the first time."

Cantelope Corner is still so rural that a newcomer is an object of interest, while it is yet so urban that its hackmen are liable to have a

grammar-school or even a high-school education, and are not expected to double their negatives. Mrs. Hathorne noticed both these little facts, with the quick eye of one whose occupation has accustomed her to take running notes of the most unpromising situations, as she jolted off in the coach with the fat shawl-strap, which jounced from her knees to the seat opposite and back again, like a passenger who had lost his balance.

"It is a town with a country heart, out here," she thought. But she was restless and disappointed about the post office. She wanted to ask the coachman to stop. She was afraid he would charge an extra fare, and meekly abandoned the idea. She was used to going without; it had become a second nature now.

Her first nature was quite another matter. She thought of it sometimes, but not often: she did not dare. They are the few and the blessed among us who dare dwell on that bright wraith who began life with us, and whom we used to call I. There seems to be a kind of antagonism between that lost dreamer and the toiler who has ousted it. Let be. Do not bring them too near each other. The children cry. The doorbell rings. The customer calls. Here are the quarter's bills.

Mary Hathorne had married her scholar for love of him, with her big blue eyes wide open;

but they were the eyes of a girl who had never had to count a carriage-fare, or wear dyed dresses, or go without a popular book. She had never heard the price of roast beef. She had never dressed in a cold room on winter mornings. She had all the new magazines; for her father brought them home. She had bought her gloves by the dozen.

Poverty she had read about. Poverty — with the assurance of ignorance and youth — she had written about; for she began to send little things to her father's paper when she was quite a girl; but personal poverty, biting, blinding poverty, such as comes to the rich in mind and spirit, the kind of poverty which holds a delicately reared, finely organized creature sheer over the precipice of cold and hunger and pauperism — of this she knew no more than she did of the Simian vocabulary, or the amusements of a London slum.

She had trained herself not to think much, or often, now, of her father's home. (There had been one of those large salaries which stop when the managing editor does, and which are responsible for the habits of ease that have no backers in accumulation or inheritance.) Sometimes now, on a dark morning, she would wake and put out her hand instinctively to find the electric bell, and ring for Kathleen to bring the hot water, and light the cannel fire in the grate; and

to put her rose-lined wrapper and slippers beside the bed. Then she would remember that she must go, shivering, and call her new maid-of-all-work, or crawl downstairs herself to shake the kitchen fire, if the old cook had "given notice," as was more likely, because of an objection to children, or a preference for cream in her coffee.

Mrs. Hathorne had been an easy, happy city girl, one of the fortunate; the motherless, only child, the adored idol.

When her father died, a year after her marriage, life had hardly begun to undeceive her vigorous, hopeful heart. They had quite a comfortable home at Zion's Hill, and she explained the absence of things by saying, We are in the country.

This November afternoon, when she crawled up the steps of the pert little suburban house of seven rooms, and her husband had gone to start the furnace fire, she drew up the shades in the cold kitchen where the grocery-book hung, and looked out. The sky was darkening over the Queen Anne house opposite. She glanced at the big gravel-pit at the foot of the street. Then the luggage came crashing up the steps, and she wondered how she was going to unpack it all with such a backache, and then remembered that if she cried she would be good for nothing. It was one of those moments when the terrible inadequacy of power to necessity overwhelms us.

"Poor Papa!" she said. Only a woman will understand that irrelevant little cry. She was glad he had not lived to see how hard it all was.

Then her strong voice rang cheerfully through the empty house: —

"Are the *book*-boxes all right — all here? The rest are less valuable. Dear! Come up and see how beautifully everything has come through. . . . Oh, it is better than boarding!"

She turned, when the expressman had left them alone, and clung to him in a wave of passionate tenderness.

"Oh, it is a *home*. Dear, don't worry. We will keep it. I will work. We will work — when we get settled. And there is my new book. You *shall* have meat enough, and all the new reviews!"

She managed to slip away from him that evening, as, with soft feminine obstinacy, she had meant to, all along. There was no kerosene. They needed tacks. There was nothing for his breakfast.

"And you are so tired. There, dear! I will run to the stores."

"I *am* tired," acceded the teacher, sinking heavily upon the cheap lounge which he had drawn up beside the register. He let her go — she smiled to think how easily, as she hurried down in the windy November night, as straight to the post office as her aching feet could carry her.

With fire on her white cheeks, and breath panting through her delicate lips, she snatched the evening mail from the postmaster. Her agitation attracted the attention of the postmaster's sister, who watched her as she tore open the only letter addressed to herself. She sat down in the show-window (the post office had been built for a shoe store) and read the letter, which ran: —

Mrs. M. L. Hathorne:

Dear Mrs. Hathorne, — We are in receipt of your MS. entitled "Love's Daily Bread." We should have acknowledged it some weeks ago, but in the pressure of business it has been overlooked. We beg to say that we will give it our consideration at our earliest convenience. We hope that it may prove as satisfactory as the novel which we had the pleasure of publishing for you some years since. We regret to say that the excellent sales of "A Platonic Friendship" have come to a practical end. We hope that the tale which we have in hand will prove to be of a more permanent interest to the public.

We are, madam, yours very truly,

Bind & Blow, Publishers.

Mary Hathorne had stumbled upon what is called literary success as softly and with as much surprise as she stumbled now, for very exhaus-

tion, upon a rolling pebble in the concrete sidewalk. She had written a book, and people had read it. That was all she knew about it. Editors had fought upon it, women had cried over it, and men smoked over it; libraries took twenty copies of it; her dearest poet wrote to her about it, and her most dreaded critic recognized her for it — all these facts had puzzled as much as they pleased her. She was too modest, too naïve, too spontaneous a woman to analyze or to train herself. She had written the book as naturally as she had fallen in love. She had accepted her success as simply as she sang to her babies. It had been a dizzy experience, short-lived and intoxicating. She was, in brief, one of too many American writers who are the victims, not the masters, of what we call fame; who are caught to the clouds and dashed to the ground on the whirl of the same tornado. She was a "one-book author." She had flashed and puffed out. She was threatened with the fate that meets the gift which has no sustaining power. She knew by instinct — for she had genius enough to possess fine instincts — that her new book would not move easily. But she had not expected as much suspense and delay as if she were a new author.

"And oh, we need the money — we need it so!" she cried.

For the proceeds of "A Platonic Friendship" were gone long ago: she had, in fact, sold her copyright for a trifling sum. Yet she had really expected her new novel to make them comfortable for a while. A chilly doubt was sinking into some quicksand in her mind. She was not used to being slighted by publishers. She tore the letter of Messrs. Bind & Blow into twenty pieces. Her husband need not see it. He seemed to be asleep on the lounge when she got in; by-and-by he turned, and asked if she had the tacks. No mention was made of the publisher's letter. If there were good news, she would have run up the steps, and dashed in to tell him. He knew, before her footfall turned the corner. But it was not necessary to say anything. Had he not let her go to the post office on purpose? No matter what she thought of him for doing so. He rolled over on the lounge like a lazy brute, while his heart was wrung for her. He knew that he spared her something harder to her than an aching back or blistered feet. He had begun already to deceive her in this matter with the divine deceit of love.

"I can't go to bed yet," she said at half-past ten o'clock. "You'd better go. The mattresses are warm enough now, and we *cannot* work any more to-night. I must sit up awhile over those proofs which came this morning. There are

twelve galleys — a double lot. They should have caught the return mail."

These were the proof-sheets of a little Sunday-school book, written over a year ago to meet a doctor's bill. The book had been paid for on receipt of the manuscript; it had not gone to press until this time.

Now proof-sheets, as none but their slaves and victims know, easily take high rank in that class of inanimate things which is possessed of the Evil. The essentially modern imagination might call them the electric cars of the literary profession. Without regard to life or limb, they roll crashing into that margin of existence which is reserved for other human exactions. They lie in wait for one's hour of maddening preëngagement. They lurk, watching for one's direst emergency. They select the confusing occasions of public amusement, and are well known to prefer a houseful of company. They delight to hit the eve of a journey. They meet the exhausted traveller at the door of his hotel. In the house of his friend he becometh a hermit, and sitteth solitary, correcting his galleys in the face of the offended host, who is a recent acquaintance, and impressed with the bad manners of the literary class.

The proof-sheet delights to detain one from the reception given in honor of the author. It

pursues one to the foot of the lecture platform, and to the pulpit stairs. It loveth Christmas eve and house-cleaning. It aims even at the wedding-day. It haunts the sick-room. It shows a ghoulish interest in the crises of bereavement. I have repeatedly known it to pursue funerals, and to call the mourner from the coffin, or meet him as he returns from the grave. On such timely and welcome occasions the printer's brief command, "Return immediately," stares in the face the unfortunate who has vainly hoped for the freedom of an hour of sorrow or of joy.

Therefore, when her proof-sheets must needs select her moving-day to add their fire to her whirling brain, poor little Mrs. Hathorne felt no undue surprise. It did indeed occur to her that if she had been a washerwoman her day's work would have been done by this time, possibly even been deferred or omitted in view of the circumstances. But this white-handed daughter of toil was a patient little woman, and more accustomed to do her work than to complain of it. She sat till midnight, then crawled up and threw herself on the bed in her clothes. She was too exhausted to undress, and Aristotle Demosthenes Hathorne was too sound asleep to know it.

The children came out when the house got warm, and life in Cantelope "set in," as we say of a snowstorm. They were pretty, pleasant

children enough; gentle and shy, and not inhumanly noisy — scholars' children; easily amused with picture-books, and accustomed not to play auction or tally-ho while their parents read and wrote. But they had the defects of their temperaments: being sensitive, they were not strong; they were ailing a good deal; the autumn was cold; the boy had the croup, and so on; and their mother did not get to work, as she had hoped, upon her novelette for the "Pacific." It would have made them all quite easy for the winter if it could have been finished; and then, if it had been paid for in advance.

"I seem to be too tired to write," she said, apologetically, when her husband came home, gloomy and bitter, from his two cheap pupils and told her that one of them was about to prefer a Harvard tutor, being the son of a lime-contractor, who thought Mr. Hathorne behind the times.

"I am sorry I can't seem to be stronger and get at it. We must depend upon my book this year. Never mind, dear!"

"You say that every time," he muttered. "You 'd say 'Never mind, dear,' if we were ordered to Siberia, or providing a dinner for the Spartan's fox."

His soft dark eyes filled. He looked at her with the adoring hunger of a man who is cheated

by fate out of his natural right to protect from toil and responsibility the woman whom he loves. Then he went upstairs and locked his study door.

She listened for a few moments to his heavy footfall, nervously pacing overhead and shaking the thin floor.

"Come, Popsy! Come, Boy!" she called merrily to the children. "Come down to the post office and get a good-luck letter!"

This nervous journey to the post office had become both the open and the secret occupation of her restless days. A singular silence had fallen upon the house of Messrs. Bind & Blow. When before had the author of "A Platonic Friendship" been kept waiting by a publisher? The book should have been in press by this time. The "good-luck letter" did not come.

"I fink it's nuffin but Sandy Close or a Bible story," confided Boy to Popsy, with masculine and modern skepticism as to the occult.

"Oh, Boy!" rebuked Popsy, on a high moral throat tone. "Ve Bible *came*."

"I fought a man to-day, mamma," observed Boy, as he cantered to the post office. "It was ve grocer-man; I pitched into him, I bet you!"

"Dear me, Boy! Why in the world should you fight the grocer?"

"'Cause I was engaged to his little sister, who sits on ve cart," explained Boy, serenely. "She

said Tennyson was a bigger writer van you, mamma. So I broke ve engagement. I *could n't* fight a girl, you know. So I fought ve grocer. She's nuffin but a step-sister, anyhow."

"Mamma! Has you' good-luck letter come? *Mamma!*"

"Run home, Popsy," she said faintly. "Run on, Boy. I'll overtake you."

She sank down on the show-window. The office was empty. The sun streamed in all over the steam-heated, suffocating room. Mrs. Hathorne slowly opened the letter of Messrs. Bind & Blow. Her fingers shook so that the postmaster's sister could see them. Her eyes dashed over the words: —

". . . . We regret to be obliged to decline the publication of your novel, 'Love's Daily Bread.' We have submitted the MS. to three of our best readers, which accounts for our delay in forwarding to you the result of our consideration. There is a diversity of opinion among them, but the odds are against the wisdom of our undertaking the work at the present time. It does not present itself to the judgment of the house as possessing the popular qualities of your former book; and we fear that its publication would disappoint both yourself and us.

"Hoping to receive from you at some future time a novel calculated to maintain the enviable

literary reputation which you have already acquired, we are, dear madam, yours very truly,

"BIND & BLOW."

The children came trotting back for her, she stayed so long; and the postmaster's sister asked her if she did n't feel a little faint.

"Don't arx her, Boy," whispered Popsy, with the quick intuition of a little woman. "Don't arx mamma for luck letters to-day. It is n't coming till annover mail."

When she got home her husband met her. His thin jaws worked unsteadily. He came down the steps and helped her in.

"He knows," she thought. "He sees. I need not tell him."

Neither said anything to the other about the manuscript; and dusk came on. She left her last domestic experiment, hopefully imported at extra wages from Cantelope-on-the-Saint-Henry, to provide such a supper as the gods might decree, and went away upstairs alone.

She looked at her drawn face with a fierce resentment that she was not made of tougher fibre.

"You ought to be too proud to cry, you poor gray-haired thing!" she sobbed. She tossed her things about to find a pink ribbon that brightened up her worn black "afternoon dress"; she added a bit of fine lace and an antique brace-

let that her father gave her. She had a grim notion of making herself gay, so nobody should notice that she had been crying. Searching for a fresh handkerchief (on such trifles hangs our fate), she opened her husband's bureau drawer by mistake.

There, face down upon his collars and cuffs, lay a fat brown parcel. She turned it over. It was the manuscript of "Love's Daily Bread." It had come by express while she was at the post office; and Mr. Hathorne had hidden it, like the poor masculine ostrich that he was, with stupid, blundering, precious tenderness, that she might not know, till he could get up courage to tell her.

It was days before either of them mentioned the matter. But when she went down to tea in the pink ribbon and antique bracelet, carrying herself in her poor dress as no woman can but one who has once known the ease and the manner of the world, the disappointed author went up to her unsuccessful scholar and put both arms around his thin neck.

"Never mind, dear," she said; "never mind!"

"Oh, I shall secure more pupils, without a doubt," he answered quickly. He thought himself a tactician of a high order.

The history of that first winter in the hired house at Cantelope Corner was the history of a manuscript.

Doubtless the neighboring Cantelopers bore their share of the universal human struggle; but sometimes it seemed, by comparison, an easy share. How fared it with the clerk, the carpenter, the baker, and the electrician in the Queen Anne house? Not one of them but knew more of daily creature comfort and less of harrowing anxiety than our two students; who, if they suspected the truth, that the grocer at their back door went to a better dinner and a warmer house than theirs, never admitted it, even to each other. The house of the electrician came to seem to them by bitter contrast a place of degree. They had been so used to the standards by which professional people judge of society that it was a moral shock to them to find themselves "looking up," as the phrase goes, to a man who ordered his coal by the dozen tons, and assaulted the English in which he addressed the expressman who brought out his game-dinners from the town markets.

"Wire has offered me a place in his what-you-may-call-it," said the ex-principal of Mount Zion Academy one day, with an ironical smile. "He has taken the notion that he would like a 'professor' attached to his concern. He suggested it on the 8.10 train yesterday, in everybody's hearing."

"You declined, of course!" The daughter of

Boston's distinguished literary editor lifted her head. She was a sensible little woman, but the scorn of "trade" was in her blood.

"I — that is — I waived the question," replied Demosthenes Hathorne, with a haggard look. "I have one pupil left."

"And I, my book!" she cried hotly. "I have sent it off again. It *must* be printed! I shall keep on sending it — till I die."

She was sitting by the window in the full light of their only sunny room when she spoke; and he looked at her closely. It occurred to him for the first time that she did not look as well as usual; but, being an instructed man, he reasoned that the impression was probably the result of a subconscious cerebration, acting automatically upon the brain-cells by the conduit of her last three words. This explanation was quite satisfactory to him.

Now it chanced that a week from that day she found herself too tired to go for the evening mail, and he somewhat reluctantly took the pathetic little walk upon which both of them had come to look with a kind of misery not to be understood in Cantelope Corner. The grocer and the electrician were spared that subtle anguish. The postmaster and the expressman, unconscious agents in the fate of the author who was outliving her popularity, looked upon the tragedy

of that higher, sadder lot with the perplexity of beings from another world.

"Mummer's deaded," announced Popsy, calmly, when her father came home with the mail that night. The little girl was engaged in pouring the contents of the syrup jug upon the face of her mother, who lay unconscious upon the rude lounge.

It happened to be one of those interregna so common in country and suburban life, to be most succinctly described by the two, and the too familiar, words, "No girl." There had been guests to lunch as a matter of course — one of the Mount Zion faculty, and Boston ladies. Our friends could not wholly escape, even in Cantelope, the fate of the refined poor. They must meet the demands of cultivated society upon less than the income of a good mechanic.

This delicate woman, who had scarcely had a broom in her hands till she was married, had dropped, after the dishes were "done," in an attempt to mop the kitchen floor.

Demosthenes Hathorne was frightened. He looked vacantly about the womanless house, then sent, for the love of Heaven, to his nearest uneducated neighbor. Molly the cook ran over with the heartiest, prettiest Irish sympathy in the world, and between them they got the poor lady to bed.

In the bustle consequent upon this incident, Mrs. Hathorne did not ask her husband, nor did he tell her, whether he had heard from the manuscript of "Love's Daily Bread." He put away the letter, which was hidden against his throbbing heart; he tucked it between the leaves of Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy." Her book had been, somewhat curtly, refused.

When she came to herself she sent the story out again courageously enough. She had begun to expect it back by this time. They now fell into the way of avoiding the subject altogether. Neither asked, "Have n't Scowl & Critic acknowledged the manuscript yet?" Neither said, "Have you tried Vellum & Volume's Sons, as you meant to?" She ceased to haunt the post office. She winced when the expressman drove down the north side of their little street.

One bright morning, when Messrs. Frisky & Flourish had returned the book, with the objection that it was too "earnest" for their trade, Mary Hathorne stoutly put on her bonnet and rather a thick veil, and went in to Boston by the next train, bearing a rising determination in her heavy heart, and the rejected manuscript in her trembling hand.

She went straight to the private office of that prince of American publishers, who will be remembered longer for his great, good heart, and

for his exquisite courtesy to timid and troubled authors, than he will for the high quality of the success which gave him his unique position in the advancement of American literature.

Her courage was born of her despair. She had never dared to approach him before. Her own publishers, selected with her natural timidity and in youth, had been but second-rate folk; and of the firms that had rebuffed her since, not one presumed to compete with the distinguished house to which, at last, so to speak, she crawled.

"I will never try again," she said, as she tottered into the elevator.

The publisher glanced at her card. "You do me honor, madam," he said, with that high-bred but wholly human manner of his. "'A Platonic Friendship' deserved the success it met. I shall examine your book with sympathy — I knew your father," he added gently.

The tears started behind her thick veil; she choked like a school-girl sending in a prize essay. In her effort to control her emotions her veil dropped, and his deep-set, observant gaze rested upon her sunken face. She had a beautiful face.

"That is a dying woman," thought the man of fine eyes.

"I have been — discouraged," she breathed impulsively.

Then, like the unworldly being that she was,

half-child, half-woman, she dashed headlong, and told him the whole story.

"I may as well take my manuscript back now," she gasped. "You won't want it — now I have told."

She held out her shaking hand.

But he who was wisest of the wise in the mysterious laws that govern the great freshets of public taste and whim — the great publisher shook his gray head, and snapped the lock of his awful safe upon "Love's Daily Bread."

"Dear Mrs. Hathorne," he said firmly, "I do not conduct my house according to the judgments of other publishers. You are tired out, I see, and disheartened, as you say. You forget that, while it is not uncommon for a popular author to meet apparent failure after a first success, there sometimes comes what athletes call a second wind. Whatever happens, you may feel sure that your manuscript will have been read by a friend to your best possibilities and to yourself. Even if this book should fail — what of that? You have a dozen better in the brain that conceived your first novel. Take heart. Believe in yourself — for the public believes in you; and so do I."

"She needs roast beef — and cream — and a nurse for the children," he thought, with swift compassion, as he watched the color dash her deathly face.

The grocer left his cart standing where it was, and ran over to Mr. We-Hold-the-Wires' Queen Anne back door. He ran fast, and entered breathless.

"Molly! Molly, my dear! Hurry over to Hathorne's for the Lord's sake; and maybe Mrs. Wire would go; they need women there! She's taken very dangerous, and nobody to home but the young ones and that Tom-fool of a Swede, who can't speak a word of Christian English, from Northwest Cantelope. And do be quick about it!"

It was hours, it was days, it was years, for aught she could have told them, when she lifted her conscious eyes to their watching faces.

"Kathleen!" she breathed.

She thought she was in her father's house. But it was not Kathleen. Irish Molly was there, crying as the women of her race cry from the bubbling sympathy of their kind and easy hearts. Mrs. W. H. T. Wire was there, so gently and so deftly serving this stricken neighbor that one would never think to ask whether her husband had been to college. And then there was a doctor, from Cantelope Cascade. A voice somewhere spoke of "such an excellent nurse."

"Has n't my husband come home from Boston yet?" asked Mary Hathorne, feebly.

Then she perceived that arms held her, and that they were his. Great burning tears fell on her face.

"Oh, Thene," she said, "it will give you such a headache!"

She did not say anything more then; she did not ask about the baby; and it was not till the next day that they told her that the little creature — born long before it was expected — had breathed and cried and died.

She did not express any sorrow, but only said to her husband: "I'm afraid I was n't quite strong enough to take care of it. And how could we have sent another through college?"

Midwinter sank heavily into the windy climate of Cantelope Corner. Do the best they might, the house was cold. She could not leave her room, and indeed she showed no inclination to do so.

"I shall be better next week," she said. But next week she was not any better. She did not talk much, even to her husband. But he could see that anxiety did a deadly work upon her. It was the mortal anxiety of a woman who has borne the heavy end of life for her beloved so long, and so bravely, that death appeared to her like the return of the universe to chaos.

"Boy must go to Harvard, you know," she

said one day. "I don't see how it is ever going to be done — without me," she added, in a dull voice. But when he tried to answer her, she stopped his trembling lips with her little, shrunken fingers, and sank away into a weak sleep.

She talked affectionately of Irish Molly now and then. "Give her some of my clothes. I have one or two dresses left that she would be willing to wear. And then there is dear Mrs. Wire. I never understood such sorts of people before. She has done things so — so delicately. I wish you could find some way to repay our obligation."

Then he plucked up courage to tell her that he had accepted the position in W. H. T. Wire & Co. He hoped to cancel any obligation they were under by serving the science of electricity, as represented in that particular firm, with the honor and the intelligence of an educated gentleman.

"I will give him more than my salary's worth!" he said proudly. "It is only on trial," he pleaded. "I have n't committed myself for more than six months. And I've about concluded, Mary, that if a man can't do one thing, it is no disgrace to him to do another. Besides, the fact is, my darling, I have parted with my last pupil."

"Oh, never mind!" she sighed, with the phantom of her old smile.

All this while she had never alluded to her book. She had not once asked him if he brought anything for her from the evening mail. Into a silence as deep as that other silence down which she was sinking, she dropped the subject of "Love's Daily Bread" forever.

"It has been rejected," she told herself quite plainly, "and he can't bear to tell me."

Only once she said to him: "My work is over, Thene, don't you see? My day is done. I've run my race, and I'm not fashionable any more. I don't suppose I write after the new style. And I have n't been very strong, you know. And oh, we've had such a hard pull!"

The tears did not start in her dry, bright eyes. She looked on, over his head, out of the window, at the cold sky that overhung the gravel-pits. She did not seem to see him. The children ran in and called her, kissing and laughing, but she responded vaguely to them.

He felt at the bottom of his heart that she was so worn out, she needed rest so much, that she was not altogether sorry to die. He perceived that she was not making the full fight. And yet, God knew! she loved him. But she was sinking for lack of a stimulant which he could not give. Already the awful distance of death seemed

to have crept in between the husband and the wife.

"Kiss me on my cheek, dear," she said. "Don't keep away the air. Oh, I've tried — to do my share — to help along. But it is n't easy doing . . . so many things. Don't let Popsy take to writing."

Popsy and Boy went to the morning mail, for their father had gone in on the early train; it was his first day's work in the service of W. H. T. Wire & Co. It wrung his heart so to leave her from eight o'clock till five, that he forgot that it was otherwise afflicting to "go into trade."

So Popsy and Boy went to the mail. The nurse and the Swede remained in the house. It was a sunny day.

The children cantered down and trotted back. She lay idly on the lounge, vaguely looking over at the Queen Anne house, and did not see the little things when they ran down the northern sidewalk. They rushed, and bounded in.

Popsy carried the papers, and Boy hugged the letters to his breast. There were several of them, and she looked them over idly: two from Mount Zion, for Mr. Hathorne; a bill; another bill; a receipt; a few pages of pretty feminine sympathy for herself from a Beacon Street friend; last in the pile, a letter in a strange hand. The envelope

bore the crest of the great publishing house, to whose threshold she had crept with the rejected manuscript which she had threatened to send somewhere "till she died."

She did not show any emotion now. She felt too near the real world to be shaken by the phantasms of this. What could happen? What could matter now? The book had been refused weeks ago. The great publisher was sorry that she was dying, perhaps. He would say some kindly thing — for her father's sake. She cut the letter slowly, with a little pearl letter-opener which the children gave her on Christmas.

A folded paper dropped from it, which fell to the floor. She read the letter leisurely.

"My dear Mrs. Hathorne," so it ran, "I owe you an apology for my delay in writing. A somewhat serious illness must be my excuse. Being now quite well again, I have myself read your novel, 'Love's Daily Bread,' and shall take much pleasure in publishing the same. I regard it as a story of a high order, and a great advance upon your first. I shall be happy to publish it upon the usual ten per cent. royalty. But I am so confident of its success that I take the liberty of enclosing our check for a sum in advance, which, I hope, you may feel an interest in receiving, as a test of our faith in the book. When your profits upon the sales shall have reached the limit of

YOU 'VE DWOPPED A GOOD-LUCK LETTER

this sum, your royalty upon all subsequent sales will begin. If these terms are agreeable to yourself, we will send contracts to that effect for your signature, and put the book to press at once.

"I anticipate for the novel a rousing sale. *You have found your second wind.* I predict for the book a literary success which will inspire you to write us a dozen more.

"I am, dear Mrs. Hathorne,

"Yours sincerely,

——— ——— ———."

"Mummer," said Popsy, severely, "You've dwopped a good-luck letter. Boy was making a cannycupio of it. I took it away, for he don't know any better; 'n' now he's playing cut his froat wiv you' Christmas letter-scutter."

The child put the folded paper into her mother's transparent hand. It was a check for one thousand dollars.

She took her first walk to the post office one divine spring day, and the children cantered on before. Hope had done its hearty work. The wine of success sprang to her head and bounded in her veins. Care fled, and death followed the footsteps of care.

What a day! The early suburban robins and blue jays swooped upon the lightning-rod of the

rented house, and swayed away, chattering and trilling joyously. The very sunshine seemed to say: "Well again! Well again!" Even the quartz in the gravel-pits glittered like something precious.

The Queen Anne house opposite was all alive with neighborly interest. Mrs. Wire came down the steps and offered her a glass of wine, and Molly ran out bareheaded and over the street, and gave the convalescent lady a good hug before everybody, for she said she could n't help it.

Then the expressman drove up, and said how glad he was to see her out again. And the postmaster's sister said she was quite a stranger, and welcome back! But the grocer stopped his cart, and lifted her in, and took her home, for he said she was n't fit to walk it. He was definitely deferential, and asked her how she liked the butter. He talked about "Love's Daily Bread." He said there was a piece about it in the Cantelope "Weekly Telephone." He said he heard it was a bigger thing than "The Innocent Sin." In the course of the little journey he confided to her that he hoped to marry Molly in July. And all the neighborly, pleasant place, the "town with the country heart," seemed to her to shine that day; and she felt as if her own happiness were something which had brimmed over till it flooded and filled the world.

Her husband came home by an early train. When he saw her watching for him at the window, looking like a new wife in her new cream-white gown, but leaning, pale and sweet, in her old place in her old way, the children, all faces and no bodies, like the cherubs in the pictures, cuddling behind her, he choked, and bowed his face, and blessed God; and then he ran up the steps, and caught her.

By and by she showed him the letter which she had kept all day. "We will read it together," she said. "I thought I'd rather wait for you."

It was the letter of the publisher who was so wise in the wiles of the world of books, and so tender in the world of the broken of spirit and of hope.

"The book is moving grandly," so he wrote. "The orders are coming in by telegraph. 'Love's Daily Bread' will be the novel of the year. When you are quite well, give us another."

"I wonder if *I* might take another?" said Demosthenes Hathorne, slowly.

He turned his wife's face to his; and if he was prouder of the kiss than he was of the book, who would blame him?

SWEET HOME ROAD

As you leave the city which is said to have the most beautiful suburbs in the world (with the possible exception of two vaguely classified by the American mind as "foreign"), and take your first trolley trip towards the queen of them, you are prepared for a pleasant, commonplace gradation from red-hot brick and aching pavement to little fighting-cut lawns and plots of pansies bought from the market in baskets. You are not in the least forewarned of what awaits you — a topographical scene-shift, characteristic of certain portions of eastern Massachusetts, or possibly peculiar to Sweet Home. Such is the name of the spot where occurred the quiet incidents that it has fallen to me to relate.

The sign-board at the foot of the hill close upon the electric track holds in letters of gold, upon a background of maple-red, the three words, "Sweet Home Road." One does not say street at Sweet Home. That would be to urbanize, to deidealize, to deface. You begin to understand why, when you have but clambered down the fire-escape of the too-modern trolley steps, and

turned to find your breath in the gusts of the on-rushing car.

Thirty minutes past, you were in the brain of the town. Now you are in the heart of the country. The electric system, proudly known as the boulevard, bristles with ten-minute trains to the stock market and the department stores. Take a dozen steps, and primeval peace receives you. The quiet is that of a place not eight miles "out," but forty. At your left a pasture sleeps serenely. On your right heavily-shaded woods of oak and pine and chestnut slide down to birch and maple meadows. Cows leisurely stroll over the low hill — when had you thought of such a thing as milking-time? One of the cows stands still in the middle of the road, and comfortably regards a red touring car, which swerves in time to prevent bereavement to an otherwise orphaned calf that bleats behind. There is no sidewalk on Sweet Home Road; Heaven and the board of aldermen forbid! The residents would rise in a petition of storm and flame, to save their banks of green and yellow, of white and red and lavender, that flank the sides of the narrow road. These are moss-banks, solid and soft as cushions; goldenrod feathers flutter over them when blackberry blossoms are gone; and barberries burn, and asters watch; and then there is a small, white daisy, known, no doubt, to botany, but too delicate to

be "called names" by the neighbor who loves it most. Or it may be foxberry or saxifrage, wood-violet or dandelion, each in his own good time — a procession of wild sweet growths, colors, scents, such as you make day-long mountain journeys to visit.

The air as you climb is wine, and the quiet benediction. You are clasped in the arms of an old-forgotten friend. In a moment, in the rustling of a twig, you perceive that the law of the place is Nature's, and that her will shall be your own. You are sunken in silence, you are entranced by calm. You are lost in such a sense of the rustic, the remote, that the signs of suburban occupation come with something of a shock. Out of the cushions and thickets of moss and blackberries, telephone poles — the forests of civilization — grow indifferently; and electric wires creep quivering between chestnut burrs or blossoms into houses so modern and so complicated that the old gray stone walls which once defined abandoned farms do not seem to have done staring at the intruders yet. The road where the cows and the calf are disappearing behind lowered bars is macadamized. The United States mail-box is nailed to a lamp-post in a tangle of sumach and elderberry. The motors of the department stores rush up across the shadows of cypresses that look to be a century old; and even the auto-

mobile heart has been known to put on brakes for the tame gray squirrels that saunter across from stone wall to stone wall.

The house-hunter, whose critical wanderings had brought him to Sweet Home Road upon the September day which he blesses when he thinks of it, observed the spot at first to be something dark and curtained by foliage.

"As well a house without windows as a landscape without a horizon," he said. With the easy discontent of an idle man, he was half minded to retrace his irresolution and climb the fire-escape of the next returning car. But six steps, and he caught the breath of ecstasy.

The hill to its summit, the woods to their places, the sky to its own! So swiftly that it seemed to have been thrust towards him by electricity, one of the sights such as men travel thousands of miles to see broke upon a vision that went half blind with delight. Every art knows its master art, and words refuse the composition of a picture which would yield its spirit only to a brush. The Sweet Home scenery, famous now to nature-loving people, and sought by many hundreds of pleasure carriages on a bright Sunday afternoon, was revealed for once to a man fine enough to love it without calculation; a man heart-weary enough to have thrown himself down

into the valley and the vista of it, as one dives into a gleaming sea.

"If I had nothing else to live for," he thought, "I could live for this spot."

The view, it appeared, contained a house — but that was a secondary matter. The agent whirred up with a blue runabout and keys. But the house-hunter inspected the building indifferently. His eyes, lured by a fascination such as he had never known since he was young and newly wedded, returned to the films of hill and intervale, of meadow and forest, of marsh and mist. He looked down upon a lake of tree-tops, and waves of green rolled to opposite shores a mile away. Crows flew from unseen rookeries known to the natural-history records as the most ancient in the State. A fox leaped trembling from the underbrush, and an owl screamed from somewhere high in the dense branches of a black-green pine. The town-bound man looked and listened sensitively.

"We have coons here," the agent was saying. "And woodchucks, too." He found himself gauging his customer deftly; as he would have said, "Three minutes to the station, and concrete walks," to the other kind of man.

"I will take it," replied the gentleman, abruptly. "My lawyer will attend to the matter at once. That is," he added, "I will bring my

daughter out early in the morning. But she will like it — yes, she will like it. There need be no delay."

The purchaser's name was Cranfield — Harvey Cranfield. He was plainly a person used to having his way; the consciousness of his own troubles had not reduced the exercise of his own will. He occupied the place as promptly as he had selected it. In two days mechanics and furnishers ran riot in the empty rooms — there were a good many of them, but the mind of the new master was a lash, and drove fast. Within a week he, with his young daughter, took possession of the finest landscape that side of the Berkshires. From the first, these two assumed the attitude of people who lived in a view, and relegated the house to the background of their attention. It was comfortable and equipped — a white two-story-and-a-half cottage, low, and adapted to intrude as little as possible upon the superb perspective. It served its purpose, but the new occupants were out-of-door people, and had the raptures which displace the passion for roof and hearth.

Such had not been the case with the last owner of the beautiful place. So profound had been his attachment to his house, that he had effaced himself from it altogether when the affliction befell

him which caused him to flee the spot as he would have fled his own memory if he could. He had carried his renunciation so far as to withhold his name from the transaction that deprived him of his property. The deeds were passed through intermediaries, and it was not till Dr. Cranfield had been for some time established in the place, that it occurred to him to ask who its previous owner might have been. A silent man, the neighbors remembered, ideally and permanently the lover of his wife, for whom he had built the house, and with whom he had passed in it several years more happy than is the lot of the usual marriage. The lady was in frail health, and died with a tragic suddenness. From that hour it was believed that he found the spot intolerable. He tore and gashed at the interior of the building till it was blasted bare, removing everything that she had used or loved. He yielded only the empty shell where he had hidden the clinging life of a great and secluded love; and Sweet Home Road knew him no more. He uprooted everything except the house and the garden of his dead wife. She had been, it seemed, a flower-loving lady.

It occurred to Harvey Cranfield — although not for some time — that houses have their heritage and bestow their legacies like persons, and that he was fortunate to have chosen for his own a home hallowed by the felicities of a happy wed-

lock. Nothing paltry, or piteous, or untrue; no bitterness or blight; no tragic recall of the great elections of life lurked in the silent place. Love and faith and joy lingered in the recollecting rooms, like realities that existed in the new master's own despite, and made as if they would be friends with him.

The girl was a duteous child, and docile to her father's will; which yet plainly was not always nor altogether her own. She bore an old family name — Dremmer. Who but a sentimental mother could have melted this into the pretty contraction, Dream?

But Dream knew little about her mother, for, in fact, Cranfield seldom spoke of his married life. The girl was now old enough to surmise that this had not been altogether happy; but not so old as to concern herself very much with that, or any other unfortunate matter.

Once she had said: "Papa, sometime I should like to go and see my mother's grave. Won't you take me, Papa?" But he shook his head; his manner silenced her like a fierce word; she never repeated the request. She had reasons of her own for understanding that her father's wish was not a circumstance to be trifled with. There had fallen between them two silences — one of the past, and one of the future. That an ungirlish, even a diplomatic reticence might develop in his

daughter, Cranfield was slow in perceiving. The child had always been as candid as a morning-glory, and as exquisite of texture. Indeed, she had always seemed to him like some species of flower, but when he had made up his mind to-day which one, to-morrow he unmade it. She passed from bud to bud daintily and tricksily, as if she were considering: Shall I be a lily, or a rose? A daisy, or a clover? A dandelion, or carnation? Sweet-pea, or mignonette?

All men are clumsy and stupid before the mystery of girlhood. Cranfield was no duller than the rest, but only slow in observing that his bud was breathing to blossom before his eyes. Sometimes he lamented passionately and tragically her motherless fate. He would have given his heavy, masculine life to lead her to a woman's heart and protect her with a woman's arms.

"Are you happy, Dream?" he asked. "Do you like it here, in this beautiful place?"

"I like the place," the girl said promptly. "I never saw any that I liked so well. I am glad we came."

"But happy? Are you happy, dear?" he insisted, and was sorry that he had, immediately.

For Dream turned from him and walked to the window, where she stood without reply, looking down into the green gulf of the valley. Her face underwent a fine modulation; it was one of her

father's own looks. And as she hesitated, the moulding about her father's mouth — that rigidity of purpose which he had — was repeated on her own young profile.

"You know how that is, Papa," she said. "There is no need for us to talk about that."

After all, what does life offer more trustworthy than the friendship of a home? The two had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of theirs in the glory of the year. Autumn in Sweet Home Road is never to be thought a process of dying, but always an irradiation of living. Dr. Cranfield had been something of a traveller in his day — after he retired from a medical practice which had never interested him, to enjoy a late-inherited fortune which did. He had seen the world, and the beauty of it, but it seemed to him that he had never known before what living color was, or what it might be.

Below his western piazza the green lake became a carmine gulf; that was the maple swamp. It broke upon shores of bronze and amber; those were the pines and chestnuts. When a blazing ivy ran up a dead apple trunk he saw fire catching the piers of a wharf. Black outlines of crows or hawks dipped like little boats across a burning bay. The landscape was a perfectly dry one. Perhaps for this reason it assumed to his mind the

images of the water which it lacked — its only lack.

He could not have said that the gulf of color had begun to waste — for he observed it so tenaciously that it dimmed invisibly, like a dear, disappearing figure too closely watched — when a tan-brown oak-leaf flapped in his face and he saw that it was dead; and Dream came in with a crumpled woodbine on which she pointed out crystals of frost that melted against her pink finger-tips as she spoke. One day she ran to tell him that she must have nuts and corn to feed the squirrels, because it had begun to snow.

Then, behold, the glory of the Sweet Home winter was peremptory with all the other glories, and pushed them aside in his preference till he seemed to have no memory left in him for anything so beautiful and wonderful as the lace pattern of bare elm twigs on deep skies; the architecture of old stone walls beneath freezing snow; the toss of blinding drift on drift in northerly blasts; the transformation and transcendence of his pine and oak groves in ice-storms when the sun smote; and the white birches — the "ladies of the forest" — fainting and falling under their loads of hail.

"This," he said eagerly, "this is the best of all." But Dream said: "Wait, Father. We have not seen the spring."

So subtle, so silent, so blended, so contrasted, so loath and so ardent, so slow and so swift — who could say that he had seen the spring claiming until it had possessed Sweet Home? The maple swamp went as red as October, and a lake of crimson floated between shores of such budding leaf-colors as bewildered and bewitched the eyes of the town-bred man.

"I am perfectly sure," he said, not eagerly, but with his critical intonation, "that I have never seen such a palette of greens. I did not know what green was, before — I have counted five new tints that I never saw anywhere — all the way from the pines to the aspens. I understand, now, why we have a green world, not a purple or a red. The Creator seems to have known what He was about," he added, with the grudging accent of a not religious person.

But Dream laughed: "Wait, Papa," she urged, with her pretty peremptoriness, "we have not found the summer."

Dream stood in the garden. It was a well-ordered garden, and she had added to its resources. Already she perceived that she should have more flowers than she could take care of. She was leaning to their acquaintance,which held the charm of a new and absorbing intimacy.

June flowers have a quality known only to wo-

men and to plants in the youth of life or of the calendar; and her garden responded to her with an ardent tenderness, virginal and reserved, like herself. She passed up and down between rows of tall blossoms, some of which she had never seen before excepting in florists' windows, or in gardens glanced at while driving by. Her dress was white, and her ribbons a pale green. She wore a wide straw hat, also wound with a green ribbon. As one saw her from the road — she appearing and disappearing between spiræa, and weigelia, and forsythia shrubbery — she had the look of a growing thing, neither quite a tree nor wholly a flower; a being born of the opening summer, sprung from the dew and the grass, and the warm brown earth, and yet not rooted to them, but endowed with a higher energy such as we might conceive a plant to have to which had been given the power of locomotion; an organism wavering between two forms of existence, seeking to decide in which it belonged.

Across the garden there was a path, not too straight for the line of beauty, and not curved so much as to suggest the doom-bringer in the first garden of history. On either side of this path a procession of June lilies wavered and walked. They stood in green robes, and carried torches of what one might call a tamed flame — a soft, lambent yellow that fed upon the sun, and could not

IT WAS A WELL-ORDERED GARDEN

be quenched by the wind. One felt that the June lily had acquired the qualities deficient in fire,—steadiness, and coolness, and gentleness.

"You are wonderful!" cried Dream. She walked between the two processions of lilies, and stooping, caught one between her hands; she did not break it, but reverenced it. The next she caressed; and in the next she buried her face. The essence of the lilies rose around her, waves of a wonderful, powerful perfume. It intoxicated the girl delicately.

"And still," she said, "there are all the roses left. Oh, I know. Roses are queens, and lilies have good manners. They are maids-of-honor, and keep their places."

She stirred up and down as if the light morning wind blew her to and fro. The lilies brushed her white dress with their gold pollen. She was dashed and splashed with it when she came out from the procession of torch-bearers, and crossed through the long grass to the iris-beds that blossomed heavily between the avenue and the upper pine grove. The iris was almost as tall as herself; she stood thoughtfully beside the royal flower. "It is a king," concluded Dream. "It wears purple, and knows how to."

She felt that the rose garden was behind her, but she did not enter the rose garden; only glanced at it over her white shoulder. She had an idea of

her own about roses — that they were meant for happy girls; their poignant beauty scorched her sensitiveness. She nodded at them gravely, as if they would understand her.

"Another day," she said, "I will visit with you — sometime when I am not so lonely."

She trailed back through the long, bowing grass; the clovers and the daisies parted for her gently and met again; her father would not shave the lawns, and she had the privilege of trampling all the mowing that she chose; she came out dewy and draggled, and stood languidly between the posts of moss-green stones that guarded the avenue. Already she had acquired the country habit of watching the road for chance objects of interest. These, in Sweet Home Road, had been few for the girl, and her young eyes testified for her. She *was* lonely — as youth is often lonelier than age, and yet not suspected by age to be so.

The more immediate neighbors were few: an old lady, too old to call on a girl; a deaf gentleman; a merry, restless family that vibrated between shore and town, expending upon Sweet Home Road chiefly the spring and autumn of their incidental attention. As for the people not quite opposite, they had gone abroad. They were pleasant, busy people, too busy to concern themselves much with Dream; and now the almost opposite house was rented. Strangers were ex-

pected any day; and Dream pouted when she heard that the new neighbor was middle-aged and an invalid.

As she stood between the stone posts, listlessly looking down the road, a closed automobile turned in from the boulevard and began to climb the hill. The car moved slowly, and ascended without jolt or jar. The girl watched its progress with unconcealed interest, and as the limousine passed her she flung one glance of young curiosity against the uncurtained window, but checked herself quickly.

"It is the sick lady," she thought. "Sick persons do not like to be stared at." She wavered and drifted away, in her white dress and green ribbons, and hurried to water her pansies. A lap-dog in the car barked petulantly as the machine glided by.

"See," said the nurse, who held the dog, "what a pretty young girl!"

The invalid opened her eyes, looked at Dream wearily at first, then with a slow and pleased attention. The limousine moved on, and up the short avenue to the rented house. Dream, in her wide hat, stooped and picked her wet pansies. She peered into their faces in search of friends; but even a dog would have talked back (like that fellow in the limousine), and pansies only looked at you. The girl's mind wafted over towards the

new neighbor lightly, as a detached petal blows on an idle south wind.

"They never have anything but nasturtiums over there. It would have been a decent thing of me to have her vases filled when she came."

She dashed off her large straw hat, impetuously filled it with pansies, all that crown and brim would hold, and ran over, like a very little girl, fast and furiously to the rented house.

"Oh, take up the hat, won't you?" she commanded the nurse. "It would be such a pity to disturb them till she has seen what funny faces they make. Nothing *ever* makes such faces as pansies do. Put them in a *low* glass dish, and boost them up with spiræa leaves below, and I'll wait for the hat. . . . By the way," added Dream, as an afterthought, "I'm sorry she's sick. Perhaps you would n't mind telling her so. . . . Oh, no. We could n't rob ourselves if we tried. We have acres and acres of them. We have n't anything *but* flowers at our house — and the view, of course. I mean, we're a very quiet family. We never shall disturb her any. We did have a dog, but he died; and the cook hates cats. There are some squirrels, and the crows, and a screech-owl. Tell her not to mind if she hears the screech-owl. He 's a perfectly lovely owl. . . . Oh yes, the hat, thank you. I was going home without it — Oh, did she like the pansies so

much? We have oceans and oceans of yellow lilies. Does she like yellow lilies? I could bring her some another time, if you are sure she *loves* them," added Dream, timidly.

As she stood talking in undertones with the nurse, a beautiful Blenheim spaniel, old, fat, and supercilious, came down from the invisible invalid's rooms, and waggled condescendingly at the visitor.

"His name is Impudence," observed the nurse, who was plainly inclined to be sociable.

"I should call him Imp," said Dream, promptly.

"She does n't," retorted the nurse, "but I do. You can, if you like."

Dream laughed, and laughing, ran back to her garden. Her cheeks thrilled with a fine excitement. She was a nut-brown maid in summer, who went snowberry white in winter, and her soft skin had the fair surprises of its type. One always looked first at the girl to see what color she happened to be. Delicate fires crept beneath her rich, warm tan that afternoon. In Sweet Home something had happened, at last, besides the view. Dream felt that she would have a reason for getting up to-morrow morning — a reason half pansies, and half lilies, and all pity. To be a poor lady who could not get up at all! Dream reflected on this fate with difficulty. She herself

was as well as an Iceland poppy; a gold young poppy, drinking down the sun.

There now occurred to the solitary girl one of the experiences, half unreal, and altogether inexplicable to men, mature women, and other inferior classes — one of the wilful, beautiful phases of feeling such as girls only know. Into her hungry and lonely young life came suddenly the missing element of romance. That this glamour should vibrate about an elderly, invalid woman, a stranger whose face she had not seen, did not cause Dream any psychological surprises. Candidly, she would have preferred to adore a man, a young man — go so far as to say one particular young man. But, for lack of the natural object of worship, she accepted the substitute deity, and her heart knelt to the unknown power.

The new neighbor was named Mrs. Meriden — Mrs. Florence Meriden; and for Mrs. Meriden, Dream forthwith existed. Every day had its projects of devotion, every hour its inventions of tenderness — that pretty, foolish, girlish tenderness which never counts the cost, and never reasons why. No longer listless, but now alert and smiling faintly, she stood in her garden, her suddenly valuable and interesting garden, choosing and culling votive offerings for her goddess.

Shall it be a climbing rose? Will she like the foxglove? Does she care for Canterbury bells? The mignonette is late, but that will please her. To-day there are brown pansies; one is walnut brown, and a sober fellow like a monk. Who ever saw a pansy like him? Round and round him twine a crowd of yellow ones — dancing girls in golden gauze to tease him.

This is to-day. To-morrow there will be the Scotch roses, tips like curling fingers; the babies of the rose garden; things to cuddle and to comfort like the dream babies that people never have, but only love to think how they would have cared about them if they had. Poor lady! Would she understand? Dream was sure that she would. The girl spoke to the invalid prisoner in petals and perfumes, saying gentle things from day to day, asking no proofs of comprehension from her unseen friend, but sure that these existed.

She watered her garden with the dew of her feeling. She seemed to feed her flowers with the nutriment of her own young imagination as Hawthorne's Hilda fed the doves.

"Your garden is remarkably successful," said Dr. Cranfield, conscious, when he had spoken, that he had applied prosaic language to pure poetry. He looked from the crown of a purple lily to his daughter's bending face, as if he had an unfamiliar metre to scan.

"Are they *all* going to Mrs. Meriden?" he asked, in his critical tone.

"I have n't anybody else," replied the girl, looking him straight in the troubled eyes. "I mean to do everything I can for Mrs. Meriden — Oh yes, Papa, I do, just as long as she lives. I take Imp to walk for her. She has n't anybody to exercise him. I am going to take Imp to walk twice a day. He's the most insufferable aristocrat you ever saw, that dog. I like to take him down a little. I make him bow to all the mongrels we meet. The nurse says that made Mrs. Meriden laugh."

"Do you never see her — this new neighbor?" asked Cranfield, slowly. "What is she like? What ails her — do they tell you?"

"It's her heart," said Dream, in a low, awed voice. "She never can get well. She may die — like that." She snapped the stem of a pale nasturtium splashed with tropical reds, and laid it gently upon the grass at her feet. "No, I have not seen her. Nobody sees her. She can't talk. They're afraid of excitement. She has to keep perfectly quiet. But she has promised — she has *promised*, when she can — *some* day, I am to see her for a minute." She drew a deep breath, picked up the nasturtium from the grass, and put it in one of the pans of water that she kept about the garden for the birds. "You shall live as

long as you can," she whispered. "It is n't much to do for a person," she added, sighing. "Only flowers, and taking an Imp to walk."

Through the last days of a gleaming June, and into the first hours of a fierce July, the feminine romance ran its graceful way. There were always the flowers and the dog; there were often pretty messages by the nurse — a few words, not too many, never oversaying — and sometimes a line written in the invalid's unsteady hand: "I thank you for this." "I am grateful for that." "You are a dear girl." "You are the kindest neighbor." Dream treasured these pale records of a vague and gentle affection as if they had been love-letters — But no, she had once received the real thing, and knew the difference. She understood quite well that she was adoring a substitute; but adored none the less for that. Dream had reached the point where a girl must perish or love; if an invisible and fading lady, so much the sadder, but so much the safer. Afterwards, when she came to count the calendar of this tenderness, she was surprised to find how brief it was; in all, the experience spanned only nineteen days; as many as the years of her life.

Then one afternoon there happened the last thing in the world which the girl could have expected, the one thing so impossible and so pre-

cious that she was afraid of it, as she was of the rose garden which one could only visit when one was not lonely.

She was taking the Blenheim for his day's walk, and had reached the foot of the hill and the grassy fringe of the electric track, when an open car clanged up, deposited a passenger at the gold and maple-red guide-post, and rang on. The passenger was a young man with a surveyor's outfit; a fine fellow, with a straight eye and a clean mouth. His glance leaped to the girl, his gaze remained, and his sun-browned cheeks went as red as her own.

"*You!*" he cried. "*Here!*"

"*Oh, Tommy!*" said Dream, and that was all. It seemed to her that this "Tommy" held the whole experience of all the women in all the world.

This was too much for the Blenheim, who sniffed superciliously at the young surveyor's shoes; then his paws grew rigid, his nose wrinkled, and he rent the July skies with the shrieks which a long and anxious life had taught him to reserve for pedlers, hand-organs, and burglars, real or supposed.

"Is that fool pup yours?" demanded Tommy. "And what are you doing here, anyhow?"

"I'm living," said Dream. Every inch and ounce of her danced and radiated.

"And I'm surveying," observed Tommy. "What luck! What blessed luck! I've got a lot to survey for an old party who wants to settle on a boulevard — but he'll keep. Show me where you live, this minute."

But Dream stood still on Sweet Home Road. Every joy in her dwindled, and the glory of her dimmed to dusk.

"Oh, Tommy, I can't! Father won't have it. He won't let me. Tommy, Father has such a *terrible* way of having his own way."

"I'll go right up and have it out with him!" cried Tommy, fiercely. "I'm getting on fast. I have a first-rate position — I shall be entirely able to marry. He has n't got a thing against me. You're perfectly bewitching, Dream. You never were so pretty in your life — I'll make my father come and talk to him. See if I don't."

But Dream shook her head.

"Nothing would change him, Tommy, nothing. He has made up his mind. He says I'm too young, and he says it is such a dreadful risk to marry. He says people are so unhappy. And I *promised* him, Tommy, that I'd never speak to you without his leave." Dream cried a little in a quiet way, resolutely yanked the Imp away from Tommy's heels, and began to back off up the hill.

"Oh, see here!" cried Tommy, imperiously.

He took three steps towards her, then he too stopped.

"I won't do anything underhanded," said the boy. "But I'll come back. You bet I'll come back. I'll *make* him let me come to see you. Really, you see, he does n't know anything about me, and he never gave me a chance to tell. My father —" There Tommy checked himself. "I'm not so sure, either, about my father, come to think. He won't set foot in this town since Mother died. He used to live up around here, somewhere — I don't know where. Do you? No, I don't suppose you could. I was in Germany at that post-graduate course all those years, and she died suddenly — you know; I told you about her — how I could n't get back. I never saw the house — he sold it right away. He has such a feeling about it as you can't guess. He won't mention it. Talk about unhappy marriages! Why, Dream, he *worshipped* my mother — the way I should worship you."

"O Tommy!" breathed Dream. "Tommy, Tommy!" But then the girl gathered herself and grew indefinably formidable, as girls can. "I promised my father," she persisted. And beyond this the young man could not or did not urge her; but ostentatiously took up his theodolite, and went to work upon the boulevard lot for the old party.

"Remember, I'm coming!" called Tommy,

obstinately. Shining, with wet eyes, Dream looked back over her muslin shoulder. She did not answer. But Impudence did. From his aristocratic throat poured such a torrent of plebeian yells that the mongrels who lived on the boulevard ran around to see the fight, and stood stock-still and stared with the perplexity of a lower social condition, bewildered and yet gratified by the follies of a higher. Tugging at his leash till he slipped his collar, Impudence doddered back to the heels of the objectionable surveyor. Ecstatically the dog took one big nip. As the Imp had lost all his teeth but two, Tommy escaped with his precious life.

"Oh," cried Dream, "he's — he's — he's an *Imp!*"

Then Tommy's laugh pealed all over Sweet Home Road.

"Why do women never laugh like men?" thought Dream.

After all, what was a woman when it came to a man? Dream passionately propounded this question to the Sweet Home scenery. She restored Impudence to the bosom of his family, and went to her garden unsteadily. Flowers? Could flowers love a person? Neighbors? They had their places. Was it so interesting, then, to take an Imp to walk? Oh, the poor lady! Dream

thought of her loyally; it did not occur to the girl for some days that she was thinking faintly. It rained a little next afternoon, and Impudence had no walk. Mellow roses, of the color that is neither topaz nor amber, went over to the rented house by the gardener. When the shower dried, Dream threw herself on the pine needles in the grove, and looked at the far, quivering sky. She seemed to herself to float above herself. She felt detached from her own body, and her ears rang. The world of women and the loves of women looked to her suddenly small and pale. She rebounded to the natural laws, and man the master came to his throne. It was plain that nobody in the world was of consequence but Tommy.

The week was hot. It was deadly hot for sick people, as the nurse said; and Sweet Home Road wasted in the July fires.

"Has she forgotten me?" panted the invalid lady.

"Oh, she *could n't!*" cried the nurse, with more tact than she was distinguished for. "There! I see her coming, now. I'll go and tell her what you said."

Dream came in with pansies — as she had come the first time. And her dress was white, with green ribbons, as it was before. The nurse took her by the hand without a word, and pointed up the stairs.

"She has asked for you, at last; she insists upon it. And I'll take the responsibility — seeing there is no doctor. Come up with me and see her. She is n't very well."

"Is it the weather?" asked Dream, trembling.

"Weather will do as well as anything," replied the nurse, slowly. "That's the trouble with these heart cases. You never can tell. You may stay five minutes. When I put a pansy here" — she touched her white neckerchief — "you will go. Be sure and make her understand you did n't *forget* her. See?"

On the wings of the winds of repentance and terror, Dream fled home. Her father was on his western piazza, cultivating the society of his view. The girl caught his long, listless hand, and dragged at it before her breath gave her words. Then these tore out raggedly: —

"Quick, Papa! You're a doctor — there is n't any other. My poor lady — she is dreadfully sick. The nurse said, would you please to hurry right over? Papa, Papa! She's sent for me at last and, Papa, she 's the loveliest lady — I never saw one so lovely in all my life, and she kissed me — but then the nurse put the pansy at her throat to tell me I must go. Oh, Papa, my poor lady can*not* breathe!"

Dr. Cranfield went up the stairs of the rented house with the quiet quickness of his once busy and useful professional years. At the top of the flight an imperious motion of the hand commanded his daughter to remain below.

On the threshold of the sick-room he stood still, and blanched. Another gesture of his wilful fingers ordered the nurse to withdraw. When Cranfield had shut the door, the spaniel, who was lying on the bed, jumped down and growled.

The physician and the patient regarded each other for one of the moments in which healthy hearts have been known to stop beating. But hers held to its feeble action, or, indeed, seemed to strengthen from the emotional shock that she had undergone. He did not think it would have done so, and had got to the side of the bed, and, from the sheer instinct of the healer, put an arm behind her. He expected any outcome.

"Florence—" he began brokenly, "I did not know."

"I hope you believe *I* did n't! — I could n't get away; I was too weak." She struggled off, and looked at him with a curious steadiness. Her eyes were as if she had been looking not death, but life, in the face. His replied as the grave replies, and concerning this she did not deceive herself; she lifted the wraith of a mocking smile she used to have. "I don't say you

were n't right, Harvey. But you were wrong, too. After the scandal — Oh, I suppose you could n't have done anything else—*you* couldn't, anyhow. I've always wanted you to know one thing, though."

Cranfield's fine profile averted itself stolidly, but his hand crept along the counterpane, a very little way towards hers. She was holding one of Dream's pansies, a black one, purple-black.

"It was n't as bad as you thought, Harvey. I never went beyond the wharf with him. I came to my senses. He took the voyage without me. . . . I . . . was afraid to go back . . . to you. I don't suppose you could forgive me, Harvey. I never expected you to."

Cranfield's iron lips stirred dumbly; it seemed impossible for them to articulate; his words, when they were formed, had more the semblance of cries or groans than of speech; like the effort of a lower organism struggling to utter the language of a higher life. But it seemed to her that he said, or meant to say, "I'm afraid I was hard with you, Flora."

"I know I spoiled your life," she added, quite distinctly. "Nothing can help that, now."

"Oh, never mind," he said fatuously. His fingers had now found her cold and quiet hand, and closed over the black pansy. Afterwards he saw how he had crushed it. The spaniel, who

had jumped back upon the bed, crawled up and pawed jealously at the united hands to separate them.

A stranger would not have known what she was trying to say, but Cranfield perceived that he understood her, every panting and difficult word. All their piteous past arose, and gave to this unbelievable present a phantasmal familiarity. The terrible and sacred power of the marriage-bond took hold of him as if it had been a scorching yoke that he must wear — no, no, that he wanted to wear, that he might have chosen to reassume — for her sake? Or only for sacredness' sake? . . . and could not . . . now. He bent to her breaking breath.

"Harvey? She is the loveliest girl . . . steadier . . . not like me . . . delicate, the way flowers are. Make her happy, won't you? Be *gentle* with her, Harvey. . . . She does n't need to know, does she? I should like that — if she need n't . . . Harvey! The nurse! *Harvey!*"

At the two cries, that of the patient and that of the doctor, the nurse ran in. The spaniel began to whimper.

The brutal July sun that had burned the breath from her cooled to a kind gray haze when the poor lady was carried away. It was the first burial procession that had passed from Sweet Home

Road — from the new Sweet Home that the comfortable suburbans knew. Harvey Cranfield wondered if those old people on the abandoned farms half a century ago loved and suffered as passionately, if they weighed and concluded with such complicated emotions as these moderns felt — these kindly neighbors who all followed the stranger from her rented house to that other, which she must occupy, unattended and alone.

It was scarcely observed that in the absence of relatives, the nearest neighbor accepted the position of nearest mourner to the friendless woman. Dream sat beside him, weeping as girls do, for little griefs or large ones, unrestrainedly. She had devastated her rose garden for her poor lady — every bud and blossom of it, pearl and pink, and gold and carmine, snow and lake, — the roses that had been too sweet for lonely girls were not poignant enough or precious enough to give good-by to dear dead ladies; with every rose there went a tear, and some of them were kissed.

So Dream followed her mother, not knowing; for Cranfield's white lips were locked. Often, too often, he had disregarded the wishes of his giddy, sentimental, and beautiful wife. This last one of hers he honored to the full. It occurred to him that he should have been more at ease if it had not been the last. It occurred to him that she

had worn to the bone the penance of a desolate and sorrowful life. He thought of his unhappy marriage with a passionate self-accusation in which he grasped but little to cosset his natural instincts of self-justification. After all, was it altogether her fault?

So the rented house fell empty and closed, and the nurse went to her next case, but the Blenheim went to the almost opposite neighbor, as the poor lady, it seemed, had caused her lawyer to direct. Impudence mourned more than he might have been expected to, but he was pure spaniel, and "of love all worthy." He seemed to have the impression that he was visiting this polite young girl, and must amiably regard the laws of hospitality till the dear and silent vanished should make it her pleasure to return to a bereaved and puzzled dog.

"He watches for her," said Dream. "He lies for hours listening. He thinks she is coming in a limousine; he runs after every one and stops and listens. Oh, I hope she knows how true he is to her."

"They make good lovers — dogs," Cranfield answered slowly; there was a melting of his metal lip; but his eyes were always dry.

The July garden had faded to the August garden, and the day-lilies were opening in the

cherished beds that had the shadow of the upper grove, when one fresh morning — dog-day being blown out of it, and cool day blown in — the postman's buggy overtook the girl and the spaniel walking from the boulevard at the two ends of a leash.

"Will you have them?" he asked, reining up; and handed her the letters. At the top of the pile lay one for herself. Dream glanced, and tore and read.

My Dear Little Girl, — You need n't make any of your pansy faces at me for calling you names. I'm going to call you anything and everything I choose, and you are going to put up with it, and me. My father is a brick. He wrote your father last week, and your father is another. They've fixed it up between them. They were Alpha Deltas, one class apart at college, and they've come together, nobody knows how, the way college fellows do, just as they give the society grip. Father is coming with me to-morrow — it will be to-day when you get this — but I'm to take a car ahead. He wants to go alone; it's going to be pretty hard on him. I'll be on the 3.30.

Take the Imp and come down to the old party's lot and meet me — please. That dog may chew me to shavings. I'm too happy to care. I'll cul-

tivate imps or anything else you want me to. I'll do anything under the sun and stars you ask me, Dream. I love you more than any fellow ever loved a girl before.

I am your faithful and adoring
TOM DUDLEY.

The middle-aged men— he who had known the ultimate blessedness, and he who had felt the uttermost bitterness of life — stood in the road outside the walls of the home that both had loved, and one had lost. A clump of low-lying lindens swept between them and the house, and obscured it from their sight. They were only a twelvemonth apart, these two, but Cranfield, who was in fact the younger, looked the older by a dozen years.

They were making no attempt at conversation. Each perceived that there was nothing more to be said, and Dudley was restless, and made as if he would return, his errand being done.

"You are sure you won't come in, Thomas?" Cranfield hesitated with the words, as if there had been a rudeness or moral disorder in them.

"I can't do it. Not any farther — no."

Cranfield noticed that his old friend still stood with averted eyes that had not sought the house, not once; no, nor the great perspective that melted beyond it in the August haze.

"You did n't expect it, did you?" asked Dudley. "I think you must see how it is. It was only for the boy and girl; I thought no matter what it cost, I'd better make the effort . . . and then, I wanted to see her for myself. But, no — I can't come in. . . . Look at them! See, Cranfield, see!"

He pointed to the grove of boundary pines, at whose feet the August lilies were opening sumptuously and delicately. Dream and Tommy were strolling up and down; they were holding hands, as if they had been partners in a pretty children's game. Dream's face was lifted like a lily cup.

"I have read somewhere," said Dudley, in an undervoice, "that Japanese gardeners water their choicest plants with the juices of the grape."

"People often call her some flower or other," replied the father, with emotion.

"Ah, do they? Who can wonder? Now she is a flower fed on wine."

By a common impulse both men turned their eyes from the girl, as if the sight of her were a holy thing and must be veiled from their observance.

"I'll go down to the cars with you," suggested Cranfield, in a commonplace tone; the moment had become too tense for him. He moved for his hat.

"No," said Dudley. "Thank you; I had rather go alone."

He turned, without a glance at the house, and they parted with no further words. In their clasped and sundered hands the joy and the tragedy of married love seemed to unite and separate, as they do in fact and deed; each cherishing its own history and its own convictions, each the prisoner of its own incommunicable memories.

The sun was kneeling to dusk across the Sweet Home valley. Cranfield went back to his house, and sat alone with his view.

Dream and Tommy moved out from the white lilies and entered the solemn twilight of the grove.

But the old spaniel climbed the stone wall laboriously and watched for the limousine.

THE JOY-GIVER

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MOTHER. SPIRIT.
FATHER. VIOLIN.
CHILDREN.

SCENE. — *A small parlor or living-room. Piano, pictures, books, violin, are to be seen, but the upholstery is plain, the carpet dimmed by the sun, and the effect of the place is unpretentious and homelike. The curtains are drawn. In the centre of the room shines a Christmas tree. It is heavy with toys and other holiday gifts, and blazing with tapers. The room is empty. A storm is heard without.*

Enter Mother. *She is dressed in black. In her hand she carries a rose-bush, blooming in a pot. It is a crimson rose. Hers is a sweet face, and she nods and smiles through the door as she closes it. When the door is closed her expression assumes a marked sadness. Without smiling, she examines the tree, arranging the gifts. Sets the rose down. Speaks.*

Mother. This is the first time! A houseful of presents, and nothing for the lad! (*Ties a doll*

upon the tree.) My first baby! And my only boy! We had a tree for him when he was six months old — that was ten Christmases ago. His father held him up, crowing and laughing. He knocked over a blazing taper with his little pink foot. We thought he was burned. I sprang and kissed his foot. . . . How soft it was! I can feel it . . . as I felt it then. (*Puts another doll upon the tree; the doll wears baby clothes.*) Last year we got him the violin — he begged so for one. "I'd rather than skates," he said. He was instinct with music, playing hours and hours. . . . I am sure he would have made a great musician! Sometimes it tired me — his practising. Once I told him to stop that noise. . . . He might make all the noise he wanted to — now. He used to play

> "Sweet and low,
> Wind of the western sea."

I can hear it — as I heard it then. And "Paradise"; I can hear *that* — as I heard it then. (*Puts a third doll upon the tree.*) Mother loves you, little lasses! — But he was my only lad. He was n't rough, like some boys. He cared for flowers, too. They seemed to know him — all the house plants that would never grow for me. How he cosseted his rose-bush! It thrived, but it never bloomed, not even for him. This is the

first time. I don't know what to do with it. I *can*not pick it. (*Stoops over the rose-bush and caresses the leaves.*) I feel as I do about that violin — nobody shall touch it! (*She picks up the* Violin *and kisses it passionately. The strings utter a plaintive cry.*) There! Mother did n't mean to hurt your feelings, sonny boy! You shall practise all you want to, Geordie! I should n't care *how* much noise . . . now. See! I'll give your dear violin a little table to itself. We'll put it there — on the silk cloth. The violin shall keep Christmas, like the rest of us. (*She decorates the table with holly, and lays the* Violin *tenderly upon the gold-colored silk cloth. Puts two tapers in the holly, and lights them.*) It looks like an altar!

[*The storm increases. The sleet raps on the window.*

Voices of Children (*from beyond the closed door*). Mamma! Let us in! Let us in, Mamma!

Mother. As soon as your father comes. We must wait for Father.

[*Storm bursts violently against the windows.*

Voices of children. Papa does n't come! Where is Papa? He keeps Christmas waiting.

Mother (*anxiously*). He *is* very late! And it does storm cruelly. It is drifting, too. (*Goes to the window and raises the shade. Puts up her hands to shield her eyes, looking out. The storm*

hurls itself against the window, the house shakes in the gale. She comes back slowly to the Christmas tree.) I wish he would come! I have acquired the habit of distrusting fate, I suppose. I never used to be a worrier. Now, it seems as if *any*thing might happen, since the boy could die. — It is drifting high, and the snow packs hard. I hope he won't come across the meadow; — it is a deserted spot, and the wind has such a sweep there. (*Stoops and caresses the rose.*) Geordie! I don't know how to keep Christmas without you, little lad! . . . Geordie! I wish your father would come! (*As she passes the table where she placed the* Violin *she starts.*) Why, I thought I left it here! Oh yes. I believe I must have one of my blind headaches coming on. It blurred before my eyes. — Yes. It is here.

[*Touches the* Violin. *The instrument utters a long, happy sigh.*

Children (*beyond the door*). Papa! Papa! Papa! (*Noise of feet stamping the snow heavily without. Door opens and shuts.*) Merry Christmas, Papa!

Mother. Ah, there he is!

[*Springs forward.*

Enter Father. *He is covered with snow, and storm-beaten.*

Father. Anxious, Mary? I did the best I could. It is a terrible storm!

Mother. Dear!

[*She melts into his arms. The two clasp silently. They do not wish one another a merry Christmas. The* Violin *utters a strange sound like an inarticulate effort to sing.*

Father (*starting*). What is that? I heard something like it before, to-night. — I thought I heard him practising out in the storm — when I was crossing the meadow.

Mother (*turning pale*). So you *did* cross the meadow? — I've asked you not to — when it storms. I never used to worry. But now —

Father. I was so late. I could n't bear to make you anxious. It is a cruel thing for a man to make a woman anxious and then keep her so.

Mother. Yes. It is one of the inquisitions. But so few men understand. That is why I loved you — because you understood. That is why I *do* love you — because still you understand. — But you have n't told me what you heard. — Let me help you out of those wet things. — Dear, what was it that you heard?

[*Removes his dripping coat; the pockets are full of packages. The two take these out, and open some of them together. They hang toys upon the already loaded tree. These are all girls' toys.*

Children (*without*). Papa! Mamma! Let us in! Let us get in!

Father. Ah! — His violin! And the rose-bush! Mary, I never thought we should keep Christmas without the boy. I did not suppose such a thing *could* happen. I've been dazed all day. — I think I lost my head coming home to-night. I know I lost my way.

Mother (*clasping him suddenly*). Lost your way! — On that meadow! — You never shall come that way in snowstorms again.

Father. You see, it drifted — well, really it was pretty bad. It was over my depth half the time. I could not see anything — no lights. I floundered a good while. The truth is — I got pretty cold, and numb. I could n't make headway at all. I remembered that man who perished there three years ago — that old man — just within sight of his own home — and nobody knew. — I could n't get him out of my head.

Mother. And his wife found him there in the morning! — You never *shall* cross that meadow again. (*Clings to him, kisses him.*) But you have n't told me what it was you heard.

Father (*solemnly*). Mary, I heard the violin!

Mother (*in a low tone*). What! No! — The boy's? — I can't believe *you* heard — anything. Why, you are a man!

Father (*steadily*). I am a man; and the father

of a dead child. And, as I live, I heard the little fellow's violin when I was lost on the meadow in the snow to-night.

Mother (*restlessly*). And I have heard nothing — nothing at all! It cried a little when I put the tapers there — but it often cries.

Father (*still solemnly*). Mary, I don't think you take it in. I don't think *you* understand, this time. I tell you I heard the lad playing in the storm. I followed the music that he played — I followed it across the meadow — through the drifts.

Mother (*in an awed voice*). And he showed you the way!

Father (*quietly*). *Something* showed me the way. And I heard the violin.

Mother (*eagerly*). What did it play?

Father.

"Sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea,
. . . Blow him again to me."

Children (*without*). Papa! Mamma! If you don't let us in to our Christmas tree, we'll have to burst the door! We've *got* to have a Christmas tree!

Mother. In a minute, dears! Only a minute longer!

[Father *and* Mother *approach the little table like an altar where the* Violin *rests. They*

bend over it reverently; they stand clasping hands. The Violin *is quite mute.*

Mother. Do not touch it! Let the boy have his way. — He never could bear to be intruded on about his music. . . . Oh, he would have been a great musician! . . . Geordie! Geordie!

[*She weeps for the first time — passionate tears; and she sobs.*

Father (*gently*). Dear, we are forgetting. The dead are God's. The living are ours. Call the children, Mary. You would not let the children see you cry . . . on Christmas night.

Children (*without, in grieved voices*). We have n't any Christmas! They 've ferguttened us!

Mother (*quickly collecting herself*). Ready, at last! Come in, little girlies!

[*She opens the door.*

Children (*rushing in noisily*). Papa! Mamma! Merry our Christmas, Mamma!

Mother (*wincing a little at the adjective, returns it dutifully*). Oh yes! we 'll merry your Christmas!

First Little Girl. Oh, the dolls! — I see six!

Second Little Girl. There 's a baby-carriage! It has twins in it.

Third Little Girl (*clinging to her mother*). You did n't ferguttened us, after all.

First Little Girl. Look! Look! I see a muff 'n' tippet! I 'll have those!

Second Little Girl. Oh! There's a doll's house, with lace curtains. I'll get that!

Third Little Girl (*softly*). Mamma — what will Geordie get?

Mother (*dashing her hand across her wet eyes, breaks off the stem of the rose; lays the rose upon the* Violin; *speaks softly*). Geordie shall have this.

Third Little Girl. You did n't ferguttened him, did you?

Second Little Girl. Mamma! Mamma! I want the sled. I don't care for the oranges.

First Little Girl. I like the skates. I can have candy 'n' apples any day.

[*Children laugh noisily and romp around the tree. The* Violin *utters a slow sound, as if it were tuned in prelude to playing.*

Mother. Hark! Hush! (*Clings to her husband timidly.*) Do you hear anything?

Father. Yes. Distinctly. — Do you? — Why do you tremble so?

Mother. Oh, I cannot explain. But I am frightened. I would give anything — *any*thing for a sign. I always said I would give my life for a sign that he was alive — but now I am afraid!

Father. There, there! You are overwrought. I do not mind it. I heard it just so upon the meadow. . . . Why, Mary! what if it were the boy? You would n't be afraid of *Geordie?*

The Violin (*slowly and solemnly sounds; the music has a broken, childish effect like a boy practising. The strain struggles out of the prelude and becomes quite distinct*).

"Sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea,
Low, low . . . breathe and blow
Wind of the western sea, . . .
Blow him again to me."

Mother (*hides her face upon her husband's shoulder. Stands with her back to the children, who do not notice her*). Hush!

The Violin.

"Oh, Paradise! Oh, Paradise! . . .
The world is growing old.
Who would not be at home and rest
Where love is never cold?"

Mother. The children hear nothing.

First Little Girl. Mine 's got a pink satin train!

Second Little Girl. Mine 's got an automobile coat!

Third Little Girl (*drops her doll and looks around confusedly*). I fought the wind was singing.

[*Hesitates. Returns slowly to her doll. The Violin* (*plays softly*).

"While my little one, while my pretty one, sleeps. . . ."

[Violin *ceases slowly.*

Mother and Father (*clinging together*). Hark! — Listen!

Mother. Did you hear it again?

Father. Distinctly.

Mother. It has stopped?

Father. I hear nothing now.

Mother (*in an agitated voice*). Dear! Come here! Come quickly! (*Moves over to the table where the* Violin *lies. The two tapers before it are burning low.*) Look! Look again! *Where is that rose?* The rose is gone!

Father. The children must have taken it.

Mother. Children, have any of you seen Geordie's rose?

First Little Girl (*with her mouth full of candy*). I don't like mushmallows. They're a sort of religious candy.

Second Little Girl (*undressing a doll*). She hooks and eyes!

Third Little Girl (*laying down her toys*). No, Mamma, I would n't be so — I would n't be so coarse, Mamma, as to touch Geordie's rose. — Why, Mamma, it's gone! Where is the rose gone to? — Papa, where is Geordie gone to? Mamma, do they merry their Christmas where little dead people go? (*She leaves the other children, and stepping gently, puts her fingers timidly into her mother's hand.*) I don't understand about it. There was a rose. The rose is gone. There is n't any rose.

[*The* Violin *breathes softly, like a being exhaling a happy sigh.*

Enter the Spirit *of a little boy. It does not open the door, nor stir the window. It is not seen to cross the room. It becomes slowly visible, the rather, as if it had been present in an invisible form and now took upon itself the sweet will to make itself known. It stands beside the table where the* Violin *lies. The tapers go out. No person observes the* Spirit. *The dead child has a radiant expression. In his hand he holds a crimson flower; it is the missing rose. As he passes the table he stoops and pats the* Violin. *The* Violin *utters, as before, an inarticulate, happy sound. The* Spirit *moves gently about among the children. Pauses at the side of the* Third Little Girl. *His lips can be seen to move as though he spoke,* "Janie? Say, Janie?"

Janie (*looks around bewildered*). Mamma, did anything happen?

Spirit of the Boy (*advancing to his mother*). Well, Mamma?

Mother (*turning to her husband*). I cannot explain how I feel! Do you see anything — at all?

Father. Nothing whatever.

Mother. Neither do I. Yet I feel as if I were a blind person. I feel as if there were something to see. It seems as if it were my misfortune that I do not see it. — Do you?

Spirit of the Boy. Papa? Oh, Papa!

Father (*unmoved*). No. I see nothing at all.

Spirit of the Boy (*for a moment looks disappointed. Speaks*). I thought somebody would have known me! (*More cheerfully.*) Never mind! (*Manfully.*) It can't be helped.

[*Goes up and touches the* Violin. *Takes the bow in his hand and lifts the instrument to his cheek. Plays softly,*

"Blow him again to me!"

Mother. I can't see the violin! — Where is the violin?

[Spirit of the Boy, *laughing, lays the* Violin *down again.*

Mother. Oh yes! Now I see it. I thought — It is very strange!

Father. It is one of your headaches.

Mother (*weeping*). I have cried so much.

Spirit of the Boy (*ceases to laugh. At sight of his mother's tears his expression grows sad, and stern — for a lad. Speaks*). Mamma?

Mother (*moves apart from the rest. Goes towards the window. Bends her head as if listening*). The storm has stopped. The wind does not cry any longer.

Spirit of the Boy. Nothing is crying but you. (*Stands between her and the window. He does not try to touch her. He looks grave and grieved.*

Whispers.) There's nothing to cry about, Mother. You spoil it all. — We were having such a pleasant time. See! Mother!

Children (*all together*). Merry our Christmas, Mamma!

Spirit of the Boy. Mother! Look here — this way — so — Mother? *Can't* you see? — No (*dejectedly*), she can't. She really can't.

Janie (*coming up; speaks quietly*). Mamma, the rose is truly gone. Geordie must have tooken it his own self, Mamma.

[Spirit of the Boy *nods and smiles brightly; tosses the rose to the little girl. She misses it, and it falls upon the floor.* Spirit of the Boy *picks up the rose and tries to put it into his mother's hand. Her fingers remain open, and the rose falls to the floor again.*

Spirit of the Boy (*kisses the rose, and fastens the flower at his mother's throat. Speaks, smiling again*). Now, we'll see!

Mother (*turning her head, feels the pricking of thorns beneath her chin. Puts up her hand*). Why, here's the rose — after all!

Janie (*obstinately*). But it *was n't* there.

Father. You must have put it there, and forgotten it.

Mother (*shaking her head*). I am certain that I did not.

Father (*gravely*). Perhaps you did not.

[Spirit of the Boy *takes up the bow. The Violin.*

"Oh, Paradise! Oh, Paradise!"

[Spirit of the Boy *lays down the bow. The* Violin *is mute.* Spirit of the Boy *laughs and takes* Janie *by the hand. The two join the other children and begin to play.*

Mother. I feel very strangely — quite happy. I cannot account for it.

Father. Probably he is happy. Though we cannot account for it. Is it necessary to account for happiness?

Mother. After all, it is no more a mystery than misery. I am not miserable any more. You cannot understand how happy I feel.

Children. Merry our Christmas! Merry our Christmas, Mamma!

Mother (*smiling*). With all my heart.

Father (*clasping her with one arm*). Let us go and open the rest of the packages for them.

Children. Some are left on top of the tree!

Mother (*cheerily*). You shall have them all! You shall have every happy thing there is!

[Spirit of the Boy *mischievously pulls the rose from her throat.* Mother *stoops to pick up the flower.* Spirit of the Boy,

while her face is on a level with his, kisse her cheek.

Mother. Ah! (*Buries her lips in the rose.* Geordie? *Geordie!*

[Spirit of the Boy *plays with the othe children*, joyously.

Janie. Happy our Christmas, Mamma Happy our Christmas!

Spirit of the Boy. Come, Mamma!

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